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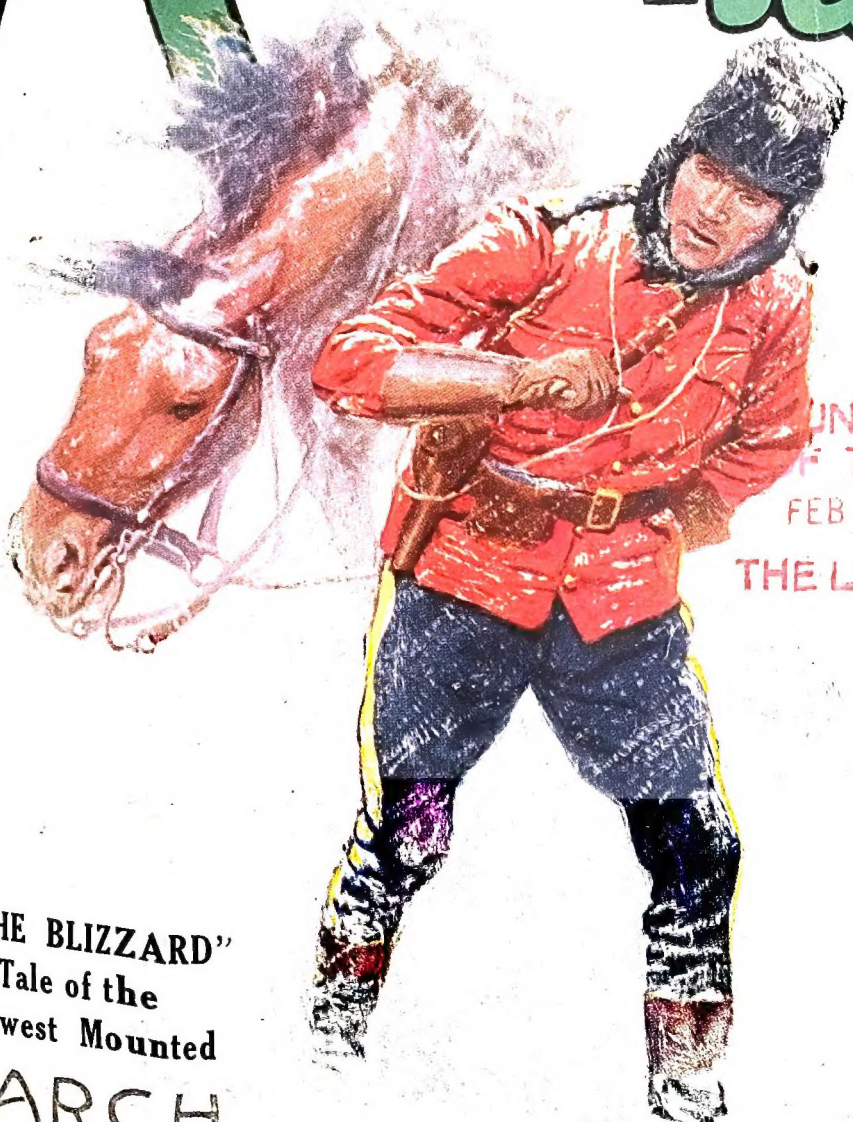

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N THE BLIZZARD"
A Tale of the
lorthwest Mounted

MARCH
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DO you remember the chap in Owen Wister's "The Virginian" who insisted on his friend always smiling when he called him a "filial descendant of a certain female quadruped?" Well, if ever "a shanty-boater" calls you a "banker," make him *smile* when he says it or you'll know he s it as a term of opprobrium. Do *you* know what a "banker" is? l find out in **"Down the Old Mississip',"** a three-part serial by **nond S. Spears,** in the April ADVENTURE. The most amusing account of a motor-boat trip ever undertaken by three "spo'hts." This intensely amusing, rambling yarn contains an entirely new vocabulary for most of us. Simply filled to the brim with funny incidents, unexpected adventures and all sorts of scrapes. The starry nights on the old Mississip', the banjos' echoes from the river-bottoms, and the whimsical people of the land of Huck Finn recall old steamboat days.

"Private Murdock's G. C. M." is a delightfully humorous story by **Talbot Mundy** of a private in the British Army whose tender susceptibilities have been touched by a lady whose Pa is in the 'Am & Beef business. Since the time of Romeo and Juliet, parents have never properly appreciated the attachments of their offspring. Consequently the poor soldier is most urgently "not wanted" by his lady-love's family. His reputation as a Son of Mars has preceded him, and the lovelorn Murdock strives to wash it away. His adventures in trying to attain his end prove unfortunate, enth hour, when all seems dark g dream, the Venus of the 'Am aves him.

Is it ever justifiable to take the law into your own hands? Read **"The Law of Club and Fang",** (another Sam Smilax story), by **Barton Wood Currie,** for pretty convincing evidence on this subject. It is what you might term a detective story without the detective. Some wild-cat gamblers in a western camp, an unidentified woman murdered, tremendous mystery surrounding the crime, and the difficulty of obtaining acceptable evidence on which to convict, present a knotty problem to young Sam and his newspaper friends to solve. What they went through, what they saw, and how eventually justice triumphed, is all most thrillingly told in this story.

corkingly humorous yarns are selected from the Jim-dandy April

Adventure

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ADVENTURE

Arthur Sullivant Hoffman · Managing Editor

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HERE is something I think you will find worth reading. It is part of a letter that Stephen Chalmers wrote to me half a year ago, presenting the idea of the series including "In the Blizzard" in the present issue. Do not waste time over the idea that it is not a true story. It is quite true. And I think perhaps it will reach in and tug a little at your heartstrings. No, it will not make you weep, but you will meet a man who was a man, and a man is never really a man unless pathos or tragedy has entered into his life and left its mark.

The letter was written from the Adirondacks.

A SHORT time ago there died in this town a man named Ralph Delamere Keefer. He was over six feet in height, obviously a man of birth and education, and possessed of a wonderful personality. For a long time he was something of a mystery. How did such a young giant come to be an invalid? Where did he get his money? In short, who was he? He was extremely reticent about his own affairs—modesty, I have since discovered—yet thoroughly genial and beloved among real male men. He was well read and a good conversationalist, yet seldom did he ever tell a story about himself. Once I said to him, "Keefer, how did you manage to become a sick man?" "Exposure," said he simply, and turned the conversation.

But after a time, and when he and I were alone, he would respond to my anecdotes of travel and adventure and come back with some startling incident which had befallen him—always in some wild and woolly region of the great Northwest. At last I couldn't stand it and said: "By the way, if it is not a rude question, what were you doing in the Northwest, Keefer?" "Oh," said he, "did I never tell you? Thought you knew. I was in the Royal Northwest Mounted Police."

THAT explained everything. About fifteen years ago numerous sons of titled Englishmen enlisted in the N. W. M. P. Here was one, I decided, and his education, intellect and keen observation had given him the chance to see that life and the people in it from the standpoint and advantage of a trained mind. Later I urged him to write down some of the virile tales of hardship, danger, death, adventure and color which he related to me when the spirit was on him. These stories were about things that had happened to himself, or with which he had had connection. But his peculiar reticence about personal matters made this impossible for him to do.

Finally, in despair, I, hating to see such stuff die with him, urged him to write them as if they had happened to fictitious characters, for it seemed to me the stories were good enough even without his personality, which would naturally crop out in the writing. Being bored by idleness after such a life of activity, he welcomed the idea with enthusiasm and set to work. Alas! recurrent illness interrupted him every other day; also, he did not have the technical knack of making a tale. The project was dropped, as I thought, and delicacy forbade me ever to mention it again.

ON THE evening of his death, Keefer's conduct was typical of him and all that we knew of him. For some reason or other, he had decided on that evening to give a little dinner to his most intimate bachelor friends. The dinner was on for eight o'clock at the Country Club on the Lower Saranac. Keefer had looked ill all day, but said it was "merely a touch of indigestion." At 7 P.M. he turned to a friend and said: "I am going to do an unusual thing and make an unusual request. I do not feel very well—not badly, but just bad enough to assure me that I should be a very dull host. The last thing in the world I would like to do would be to bore my guests. I want you to explain this—they're all good fellows—and *you play host.*"

This was done, the friend taking Keefer's chair at the head of the table and playing proxy. The dinner was a howling success, the absent host being toasted again and again. And they sang "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow."

Ralph Delamere Keefer, in the meantime, had risen from the little corner where he sat in the grill-bar of the Inn where he lived in the village, courteously bowed his usual good-night to Jimmy the bartender and gone up-stairs to his room. He knew he was dying, I think, but was too much of a man to make a fuss about it. At ten-thirty, the dinner over, the proxy host came to his room and found Keefer sitting on the edge of his bed, looking terribly ill.

Keefer immediately asked how the dinner went, inquired after his guests by name, heard the best of the bachelor stories told, and talked as if nothing were seriously amiss. His friend, however, perceived differently, excused himself, went downstairs and called a doctor. The doctor came, entered the room, induced Keefer to lie down. Keefer obeyed, expressing regret that he should cause any one any trouble, and submitted to medical attention. The friend, in the meantime, discreetly left the room. Fifteen minutes later the doctor came out of the room, looked over the balustrade to the friend who was waiting below, flung his hand up in the air and snapped his fingers. Ralph Delamere Keefer was dead.

TWO days later this friend, who was found to be his executor, notified me that Keefer had left to me a number of literary documents, the direction being that I do with them as I saw fit. On looking over the documents I found that they were the tales of life in the Northwest Mounted Police which we had so often discussed.

. . . The tales are a vivid picture of life in the great snows as it was and will not be much longer, . . . needing only a little rewriting. . . . . all based on his own experiences.

Now, these stories have become my property and I can do what I please with them, even take the material in them for my own use. But I prefer to follow the line Keefer himself once suggested, that I should collaborate with him. He did his share of the work while he lived, and I can do my share now that he is dead.

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A Lesson in Nerve

Having to do with Sam Smilax.

by Barton Wood Currie.

I

WHEN Speedy Thurston offered Sam Smilax the job and full emoluments of Beautiful Pete of Rainbow Ledge — quoth Cantilever Jones — he informed the lad that he was paying him a top-lofty compliment that he ought to appreciate.

"Dealing faro in the Palace," said Speedy, "is no juvenile pastime and, figuring by the birth-register, you ain't a horrible lot o' moons out o' short breeches. Beautiful Pete was an old hand at it afore I took him on. He had a face and fins for it—the best pair o' fins I ever see on a faro-dealer. As for his lamps, I never hope to find their equal for cold stony blue. You could see your own face in 'em afore you'd get a change of light or shade, the same being true if he was looking into hollow hardware or listening to a funny story.

"Eight years Beautiful Pete tended my layouts and never made a mistake or cracked a smile. How he gets love-smitten by that yellow-haired widow who come over from Stockton to bury her second husband is a proper miracle which don't add up or down. He goes through that ceremony just as solemn as he tended box here, when he ought to dropped down dead laughin' at himself. Of course, he can't laugh at himself nor nothing else, being absolute an' total lacking in a sense o' humor.

"That's the on'y fault I ever laid against Beautiful Pete, Sam, and I sure am glad you got some o' that old smile your dad had. I put up with a lot from Pete on account o' his hard-boiled view o' things and I'm walking lame to-day as a result o' his not being able to see a joke.

"Three years ago I took a day off and went down to Carson City to see a couple o' lightweights go forty rounds in a broiling sun. It was a rattling good bout an' the best boxing I ever lamped. A neat short-

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arm jab on the chin wound it up, as pretty a wollop as was ever put over with a padded mitt. Coming back to Reno, I give Beautiful Pete the history of the mill, not missin' a round, and when it come to the wind-up I was so excited that I couldn't help illustrating, an' down goes Pete in the sawdust. Darned if I hadn't duplicated that short-arm jab neat as a stroke o' lightning.

"If Pete had had any sense o' humor, he'd a-climbed up an' rubbed his chin an' mebbe grinned. But it naturally ain't in the cuss. He's no sooner up than he dives behind the counter where I keep my emergency Winchester an' he's got her going afore I can make the door. Mad as he is, his aim is good an' he puts a ball through the calf of each leg. He come to see me in the hospital, Sam, an' offers to resign his job.

"'Resign nothin', Pete,' says I, 'you're too thundering good a faro-dealer—the on'y thing I don't like about you is that you got no sense of humor.'"

"It looks to me," says Sam, his eyes twinkling, "like as if you'd expected too much of Beautiful Pete. You can't expect a fellow to laugh much if you dislocate his jaw. Howsomever, I'll fill in Pete's job till I can find something more exciting, seein' as you're about the on'y friend I've got since, since——"

"You bet I'm your friend, Sammy," spoke up old Speedy, gripping the boy's hand and wringing it. "There's a whole lot I owe to Tom Smilax; an' seeing as he's left us an' can't come back to collect, I'll go the limit with his boy. There ain't a whole lot in the way o' refinements an' polish you can get here in the Palace, but if you're a-going to stick to the Sage Brush State you'll learn more in six months right behind Pete's old table, about the people who are running it and making their piles in it, than you could get in forty years in all the colleges in the universe. And if you save your money like Pete did, mebbe you can pick up a yellow-haired widow and retire to a thousand-acre ranch."

STEVEN PEDDY THURSTON, or S. Peddy Thurston as he wrote it, or Speedy Thurston as he was known from Silver City to the Smoke Creek Desert, may not have measured up to any of the rigorous standards set by the moralists and preceptors who hold the center of the stage east of the Continental Divide. In some quarters he would have been branded as a pernicious social evil, a horrible example and an undoubted limb of Satan, for he fostered gambling and sold strong drinks and had been known to use deadly weapons with lethal effect. He should have had the face of a gargoyle, the body of a monster and a cloven hoof, as a warning to all who came within his sinful zone; yea, to fill out the picture, he should have breathed fire and brimstone and signed his name with a red-hot finger that sizzled sparks.

Instead of which, however, he was a picture of gentle benevolence, had a kindly eye, a caressing smile and spoke with a soft, melodious drawl. His countenance was round and ruddy and his hair snow-white and, if it hadn't been for a slight portliness and a peculiar droop to his massive shoulders, he would have possessed as fine a figuse as the sculptors would care to model.

As for a moral code, Speedy's was much briefer and more complacent than the decalogue, to wit: *Give every man a square deal and go the limit for a friend.*

He lived up to this rather scant fabric of ethics to the letter, took his profits, paid his way, was generous with both hands, respected women and loved dogs, all of which, said and done, let him out, as the saying goes.

Sam Smilax had got all the known history of Speedy Thurston from his father, early in his boyhood. The elder Smilax was much the same pattern of a man, save that he lacked Speedy Thurston's willpower and phlegmatic poise. He was every bit as liberal in his views of the way the affairs should be ordered in that rough-dressed cosmos which includes the outposts of civilization. All sin was relative and lawlessness a matter of personal principles.

Having had this sort of an elementary education, young Sam went to work in the Palace with his eyes open and his ears ever on the alert. He knew he had to learn a lot of the Nevada game in life and he possessed that rare faculty of minute observation which is one of the attributes of genius.

The first six months of Sam's apprenticeship in the craft of professional faro-dealing was not marked by any striking event. There had been a semi-occasional shooting but no coroner's case. He had had no personal encounters and there did not seem

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much likelihood of any. He had hoped at first that some one of the three Big Gun Guardsmen he had had that famous little session with in Hawthorne might drift in and start something and it was almost exclusively for their benefit that he wore his pair of .38's, until his employer suggested that he had better stow them back of the bar with the rest of the staff's artillery.

"It's always been my custom," advised Speedy, on that occasion, "to play on the defensive behind intrenchments, and it ain't more'n three jumps from your chair to the bar. The doorway's in plain view from where you sit and, if you notice any bad friend coming in, you'll have time a-plenty to heel-up."

"What about stick-up men?" asked Sam.

Old Speedy chuckled and cocked one eye.

"Stick-up men," he said, "is getting scarce as fairies along this Overland Trail. It's so long since I seen one that I plumb forget what they look like. There hasn't one o' them visited any o' my places in goin' on six years. The last one that come in here was a Swede an' stuttered. He was armed middling heavy with old-style Colt's, the rim-fire kind with the frog-hammers you got to use both hands to cock. Owing to the impediment in his speech an' the fact that he'd neglected to cock them hammers, I couldn't help laughing in his face, an' went out easy from behind the bar an' took 'em away from him. He made one of the best bartenders I ever had. No, he wasn't one o' the regular stick-up men like they used to have in my younger days, Sam—that breed is dead or joined the Salvation Army."

II

IT WAS 7 P.M. Pacific time by the big clock on the wall behind the klondike layout in the Palace when Speedy Thurston concluded the above observation. The month was May and the weather chosen by kindly gods. Down in Carson City a similar clock was recording a similar moment in the day's course in a less pretentious establishment that was conducted under a license taken out in the name of S. Peddy Thurston. Said Carson City establishment was known as the Parlor. Old Speedy had set the fashion in this breed of names and clung to them all his life.

Now upon that mystic instant of 7 P.M. of a certain day in the month of May there was just that doing in the Parlor which the absent owner of the establishment bemoaned as a forlorn improbability—an armed stranger was sticking up the entire menage and gathering unto himself two bags of coin stamped with the initials *S. P. T.*

News of the event was brought to Speedy the next morning by an excited courier. Sam Smilax was sitting by and he watched old Speedy's face as the narrative was unfurled in all its spluttering details. Recalling Speedy's words of the evening before, Sam's countenance wrinkled into a multitude of smiles and, when Speedy turned and saw the smiles, he was forced to grin in acknowledgement of the humor of the coincidence.

Turning back to the courier, he asked:

"How many of you lads were in the place at the time? Five, eh? And you tossed your flippers perpendicular, all except Gus, who handed over the stuff! Well, well—how much was in the bags? Two thousand? What sort of a looking chap was he?"

The courier thought he was middling tall, slim, smooth-shaven and had a black eye—that is, a pair of blackish eyes. He came on a brown horse and went away on a brown horse, and Sheriff Boggs was playing poker across the street and refused to pursue till he'd finished a wrangdoodle.

"Hm," said Speedy, pursing his lips and crinkling his furry, white eyebrows, "go back and tell Gus that if it wasn't for the fact he's father of twins, I'd dock him a day's pay."

After the courier had departed, Sam Smilax remarked:

"Well, boss, there seems to be one of 'em left over."

"Yes, ding the luck," grumbled Speedy, "and I missed him."

ALTHOUGH the Palace never closed its doors, day or night, Sabbath or holidays, there frequently occurred in the early forenoon a complete lull when not a wheel turned and the Ganymedes behind the long mahogany counter stood listlessly at attention. Such lapses were not of long duration and there were busy seasons in which they never came.

There came such a lull well along on the morning after the arrival of the courier from Carson City. Old Speedy Thurston, accompanied by Sam Smilax, arrived in the midst of it.

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"Huh!" he ejaculated, as he surveyed the great silent room and the half-dozen idle men who served the various game-tables on which he paid a tax of seventy-five dollars a month.

"Get busy," he snapped, as he removed his coat and slipped on an alpaca jacket. "Start up those spinners and shoot the pills. Make a noise. Talk—get up an argument. Any live man who stuck his nose in here would think it was the morgue."

Keeping up a running fire of this and serving by his very presence to inject a potential vitality into the heavy atmosphere, the old reprobate bustled behind the bar and began counting up the receipts of the night and wee sma' hours. Sam Smilax let himself down into his chair behind the faro layout and was absorbed in the sporting pages of the *San Francisco Bulletin* of the afternoon before, when he jumped at a sudden hail from the doorway.

"Ship ahoy! Clear your decks and lay your sheets for the starboard-tack. Easy there on the main-shaft-hoist—this is no —— coal-mine! Whee, lads, but it's May and sunny!"

Having discharged this crazy salutation in a single volley, the owner of the voice came on in with a rush. He had a perceptible list to starboard, but was nevertheless master of the fairway and berthed gently against the bar directly in front of the mildly surprised Speedy Thurston. Old Speedy's smile for custom came automatically to the surface until there suddenly planked down in front of him two bags of coin—two canvas bags of a familiar size and texture and boldly initialed *S. P. T.*

"Stow the pin-money in the safe, papa. Little Roger is going to play games—and kindly have one of your white birdies mix me a Tom Collins."

All this was said with an accompanying smile that seemed to tell Speedy Thurston that the owner thereof loved him. He was a young man and mighty good to look at. His teeth were very white and perfect and his eyes were very dark and very bright. Likewise he was middling tall and gracefully slim. There was white dust on his cheeks and in his hair, and his blue flannel shirt and rough blue trousers were caked with dust.

That he was pretty deep in liquor was evident from the bright spots on his cheekbone and the slight glaze that dimmed the steely glint in his black eyes, as well as from his manner of speech and the way he draped himself against the counter.

From where Sam Smilax sat he got only a profile view of the face and barely saw the tops of the two canvas bags that had clanked upon the bar.

The two bartenders considered it beneath their dignity to bestow more than half a glance upon this type of guest. Nor was it anything unusual for men in his woozy condition to present bags of gold to be kept in the safe until they became bags of air.

SPEEDY THURSTON did not take a second look at the bags before sweeping them off the counter and stowing them away and he was chuckling to himself as he shut the safe-door and turned back to the bar and gave the order for a Tom Collins to one of the wooden-visaged mixers.

"How much do you figure the contents?" he said amiably to the still smiling young man.

"What the —— difference does it make?" came the quick retort. "I'd trust your face with 'em full of diamonds. It's gold, in them bags, and it rings music, and buys the joy-juice. I'll draw on you as I needs it. Here's your health and may you never go broke and have to beg."

"Same to you," laughs Speedy, "and I don't reckon you ever begs."

"Not so you'll notice it, papa," and that happy young person chuckled gustfully to himself.

"That brown pony you got outside is considerable dusty, friend—come far?" said Speedy, making change for the double-eagle that had been flipped to him.

"Not so horrible far by sea-reckonin', but one gosh-awful distance by these dust-flats. Back to the tossing billow for Little Roger. I'm done gold-minin'—it's nigger's work."

"You wasn't mining in a mint, was you?" drawled Speedy, cocking one eye.

The black eyes opened wide and the sharp points came out of the mist. The slouching figure stiffened and the smiling lips drew taut.

"What's all this —— catechism for?" he blazed, in a sharp undertone. "Do you need halos for passports in this joint? If you don't like the style of my dust, pass her back."

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Old Speedy repaid this with a beaming grin and reached his hand across the counter.

"Grip, lad," he said, "grip. You're welcome to our city and if it's your desire, I'll tear the limit off."

Little Roger's smile came back as swiftly as it had gone and he ordered another and a larger Tom Collins. When he had gulped this down it suddenly occurred to him that he had better look after his horse and, after making the threat to come back and break every bank in the Palace, he hauled around in the wind and went out under full sail.

III

THE good humor of Speedy Thurston shone as a beacon-light throughout the morning. Nor pid the glow fade when a big cattleman from the Washoe Range came in and put it over on Grouchy Moran, tender of the crap-table, to the tune of ten hundred hard dollars.

"Why all the joy?" asked Sam Smilax, when he and Speedy went out to lunch.

"I've got a funny joke inside of me, Sammy," came the burbling reply, "the funniest joke that ever crawled under my skin."

"Too good to let out?" asks Sam.

"Too good to go screaming around corners," says Speedy, "but as you ain't one o' the talking kind, I'll tell you. Notice that young feller, with the shifted ballast and the two bags of coin, drift in this mornin'?"

"The noisy party with the sailor talk?" responded Sam.

"The same," gurgled Speedy, "the noisy party with the sailor talk and the loose running-gear. He's some lad, an' I want you to take notice of his style."

"Thanks," said Sam, "but I ain't particular interested in loud boozers. Since the S. P.'s been running excursion-specials from 'Frisco to Lake Tahoe for the fishing-season, Reno's got an oversupply. I'm gettin' sick o' dealing to 'em. Half of 'em can't see the cards and a blind man could trim 'em to their vest-buttons."

"Haven't piped any Class A stick-up men in the bunch you're complainin' of?" mumbled Speedy. "I reckon not. Well, this young chap with the black eyes and the heavy sea running is the same slim actor who stuck up the Parlor down in Carson City. That money he passes me to tend for him while he's tearin' things loose is my own coin, filled into my own stamped bags. What do you know about the nerve of the rat, walking in and asking me to bank my own gold while he spends it?"

Sam Smilax's eyes spread wide.

"Sure thing, Sammy," continues S. P. Thurston, Esq., "and he called me 'papa,' and smiled on me like he loved me. Ain't that enough to tickle your gizzard?"

"What are you going to do about it?" asked the stupefied Sam.

"You didn't notice me blippin', 'Help, help, police!' did you?" Speedy chuckles. "I should say not. So long as he spends in the Palace, I'm going to let him spend down to the bottom of one bag. He may wise up in between. If not, I'll whisper to him and see how he takes it."

"Suppose he has a run of blind luck?" young Sam inserts. "What are you going to hand him out—wooden money?"

Speedy Thurston screwed his eyes into a knot and looked blank for an instant. Then the clouds cleared and he laughed:

"If his luck runs that way mebbe I'll have to take him into private session in my little poker-room."

"It'd be a good joke if he stuck you up for four bags," said Sam, while his eyes twinkled. "Then I guess you wouldn't be wearing such a glad-dog grin."

"Haw, haw," guffaws Speedy, "he's welcome to try—there ain't none of 'em ever got away with it yet. He didn't need much more than a correspondence-school course to stick up Gus, but he needs a pretty darned thorough education to get away with a nick out of a two-bit piece with your old Uncle Steve."

IT WASN'T till well along in the shank of the afternoon that the slim stick-up man returned to the Palace, and both S. P. Thurston, Esq., and Sam Smilax had to look twice before they recognized him. He was someway duded out in flannel pants, a blue silk shirt with a flaring bow-tie and a nifty gray Stetson. There wasn't a speck of dust on him and he'd been barbered close as a marble image. There was still those bright spots on his cheek-bones and a glazy gleam in his black eyes to show that he had continued to hurl in an occasional gill of hard liquor and loved himself and the world at large, but he was

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steady on his feet as a church, and unless you happened to be an expert in the subtle signs of alcoholic exaltation you might have entered him in your little memo-book as an entirely sober young man.

Old Speedy Thurston was cozy, ensconced in his lookout-chair in the corner, from which perch he could glimpse all the games running, the bar, the front door and the exits. Speedy kept close tabs on the gambling enthusiasm of his guests. To heavy winners he sent goblets of creamy wine and sandwiches, to make them feel at home, thereby inducing them to stay around until they had lost their winnings and paid handsomely for their entertainment. As for the losers, they didn't need any urging to call for refreshments on the house, and Speedy never denied them hospitality unless they were of the stew-bum variety, in which case they were limited to short rations of steam beer. There were caste distinctions in even such a rough and ready establishment as Speedy Thurston's Palace.

The gala-decked stick-up man headed straight for Thurston's chair, hauled out a stool for himself and made himself comfortable.

"Well, papa," he opened with his forty-candle-power smile, "I reckon we'll have to tap one of the little treasure-bags again. I jumped your rough-riding trolley-car and ran out to Moana Springs to boil some of the alkali dust out of me. Also, you'll notice I bought me some gladsome garb. Money is certainly loose in my fingers, papa, and I'm down to one bean."

Speedy Thurston looked him over with an amiable squint and drawled:

"How much this time—you terrible young spendthrift."

"Make it five hundred in yellow paper," said the young chap, matching Speedy's drawl. "I don't want to spoil the set of these pockets with those infernal sinkers."

"Calculate you're goin' to spend all that in one evenin'?" asked Speedy.

"One evenin'?" laughs that gay young bandit. "Mebbe one minute, or mebbe I'll run it up to a bank-roll I'll have to buy a valise for. I've got a notion I can break a couple of these banks of yours. That table with the fore-and-aft spinners looks pretty good to me. Toddle to the big iron box, papa, and fetch the certificates."

SPEEDY THURSTON made a funny gurgling sound in his throat, got up and went to his safe. Removing five hundred dollars in gold from one of the two canvas bags, he laid it aside in a pigeon-hole and then reached in another cranny for a roll of yellow boys, from which he deducted ten fifties. Returning to his chair, he counted them over and pushed them at the stick-up man.

"Thanks," he burbled, fondling the bills, "this will do for a feeler, but before I begin I'm going to buy that old moss-whiskers at the bar a bottle of wine."

"Buy old Lem Boggs a bottle of wine!" said Speedy, gasping.

"Sure," said the stick-up man, "he looks as if it would perk him up some—I never see such a human gloom."

"It ain't for lack o' raw spirits," spoke up Speedy. "I've got to keep a special high-proof brandy in stock for his private perusal an' then he's always kicking 'cause it ain't hot enough. Lem says bubble-water is only fit for shaving with or cleaning harness."

"Well, I'll try him out on it," chirps the stick-up man, and ambles over to where Lem Boggs is leaning against the counter, sipping a goblet of 120-proof acid.

"Good evening, General," said the stick-up man, "will you join me in a large bottle of the parlez-vous grape?"

Lem Boggs put down his glass and gripped his beard.

"A large bottle of who?" Lem asks, getting a misty focus of the stick-up man.

"Cham-pag-a-nee water, out o' one o' those nice cool buckets to starboard," says the stick-up man.

"Thanks," says Lem Boggs, "I'll take the money."

The stick-up man took this between the eyes and it rocked him a trifle.

"Repeat," he says, as he comes to.

"I'll take the money," says Lem Boggs, without batting an eyelash.

"How'll you take it, in bills or gold?" asks the stick-up man, quiet and even.

"I ain't partikerler," says Lem Boggs.

The stick-up man peeled off a fifty, passed it with a low bow, wheeled round and went back to Speedy Thurston.

"Reckon I lost my thirst, papa," he said, with a grimace, "and there ain't nothing left to do but play the wheel. I noticed old moss-whiskers had thirteen buttons on

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his coat and vest. It cost me more'n I expected to find that out. Now I'm goin' to test your nerve, old sport—you stand to lose $15,750 if I ride this little bundle of bills on number thirteen. Can your pulse stand it?"

Speedy sagged a little at the middle, but managed to keep his smile gleaming. Five double-eagles on a number, or the risk of paying out $3,500 on a single turn of the wheel, was his customary limit. For a guest of the Palace to propose annexing sixteen thousand samoleons at one whack, using as investing-capital Speedy's own money, caused a slight fermentation in the old fellow's brain. The funny side of it came uppermost in a flash, however, and Speedy immediately nodded:

"Go ahead, boy. If you're in such a fool hurry to lose your money, the house will accommodate you by killing the limit."

IV

PRECISELY at that moment, Salt River Sam, who tended one of the spinners of the big double-ender, had stepped out to supper and, as there was no faro play, Sam Smilax was filling in for him. The only players were two timid tourists who were handling ten-cent chips as if they burned them. When the stick-up man stepped up and asked quietly for four $100 and one $50 chips, the timid tourists seemed turned to ice. Sam Smilax, though, was a graven image and made a slight-of-hand gesture by means of which he invisibly transferred to the nonchalant stick-up man four purple and one maroon chips.

Even the stick-up man was dazzled by young Sam's deftness and paid him the compliment,

"Couldn't have done it niftier myself, friend. Now oblige me," he added, "by giving an extra heave to that spinner when you toss the pill—I'm laying the total stack on the hoodoo and stand to win the price of a tidy little schooner I've had my eyes on these six years back."

Sam had caught a nod from Thurston and made no objection to the $450 bet. As he let go the little ivory ball, he looked up into the calmly smiling face of the stick-up man and quietly declared:

"This is thirteen's night off."

The tourist with the little pink mustache and rubber-rimmed specs. writhed on his stool till the stick-up man touched him on the shoulder and said in his ear:

"Keep still, Alfred—your face'd queer the luck of a corpse."

Alfred kept still, while his eyes seemed to be pressing the lenses out of his specs.

The fat tourist with the scenic vest and cap to match whispered to the stick-up man in a voice of awe:

"If you win, you get how much?"

"If I win, George," purred the stick-up man, "I get the price of what it costs to try and hang a man of your build back East."

George edged away.

Sam Smilax and his customer watched the spinner come out of the haze and the little ivory ball take the hurdles.

Presently the stick-up man addressed Sam:

"So you don't believe in the hoodoo this trip?"

"That's not my hunch," said Sam, giving back smile for smile. "If you'd asked me for a dream, I'd have said thirty-one—the same number that came up last time."

The ball had now come down to the long jumps and the tourist with the rubber specs. was writhing again, while the fat tourist was so excited he took out his watch and bit it. The stick-up man leaned over, swaying on his toes, as the ball came down to its final eccentric stride. His smile didn't vary a line as the pill vaulted the thirteen pocket, crawled out on the spinner again, rode half a turn and plumped into *thirty-one*.

"H'm," he mumbled, as his black eyes flashed on Sam.

"If you think the wheel's rigged, stranger," Sam shot out, "crawl under or lift out the spinner."

"Rigged, ——!" said the stick-up man, showing all his teeth. "I know a crooked wheel by the buzz. Used to run one myself. But if I had your style of hunch in my system, boy, I'd own the State of Nevada," whereat he turned on his heel and walked back to Speedy Thurston, who was cosily snugged in his chair, smoking a corn-cob pipe and manifesting no symptom of interest in what he considered the exceedingly remote possibility of his losing $15,750 in one fell swoop.

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"I LOSE this time," grinned the stick-up man, "but I ain't plumb discouraged. I'll go back at you, papa, if you're still game—five hundred plunks on the double-aught. You stand to lose a nice little $17,500."

"Then you'll have to break open the second bag," said Speedy, twirling his thumbs.

"Sure thing," said the stick-up man, "so run to the safe before my hunch gets cold. I just see a funny pair of specs."

"I don't fancy to break open the second bag," says Speedy, shaking his head.

"You don't, eh?" snaps out the stick-up man. "What the ——"

"Sit down," says Speedy, pointing to a chair, "and keep your voice under. Did you notice the lettering on those two bags?"

The stick-up man sat down and his scowl wasn't pretty to look at.

"Are you looking for trouble?" he threatened, through tight lips. "I'm liable to start goin' bad."

"Not in here you ain't," Speedy gave him back in the same timbre. "There's a coroner and undertaker handy next door. Now wait—that isn't what I'm getting at. Those two bags of coin are mine. Sit down till I finish! My name is Steven Peddy Thurston and my initials run *S. P. T.* I'll repeat it—*S.*—*P.*—*T.* Also, I'm whole owner of the Parlor, down in Carson City."

The stick-up man let his arms go limp. The blood welled back from his eyes and temples and he was thinking mighty hard. He had been shocked cold sober, but he showed in less time than it takes a weasel to wink that he didn't streak yellow no way.

"I've got a proposition," he blurted, leaning forward and tapping Speedy on the knee.

"I'll admire to hear it," says Old Speedy, without removing his pipe.

"Lend me a pair of smoke-wagons," volleyed the stick-up man. "I don't carry 'em at play—on'y while I work, and I left my brace up at the baths—Moana Springs."

"Want to stick me up some more?" Speedy drawls, with the flicker of a smile.

The stick-up man snorted.

"You know different," he chopped out. "I want to square the card. I want to go out and pick up enough to fill up that bag. It ain't on my schedule to rob a game old party like you, though I reckon you could stand it. Hand me a pair of pop-guns and I'll take a turn around the village. I'll fetch you back that thousand before midnight."

The old reprobate Speedy Thurston was chuckling from his toes up.

"So it's your purpose, young un, to rob Peter to pay Paul, Paul bein' already stuck up."

The stick-up man flashed a grin and nodded.

"I believe you'd do it," Speedy complimented him.

"You can gamble I'll do it," said the stick-up man, level and even.

"I'll go you, lad," Speedy burst out. "Just you sit still and when I come back I'll drop a pair of .38's into your coat pocket."

Speedy got up and loafed back of the bar, while the stick-up man crossed his knees and set blaze to a cigarette. He got up with his back to Speedy as the old villain hobbled back to his corner, and not an eye in the place glimpsed the transfer of hardware.

"They ain't loaded," said Speedy, over his shoulder.

"Good," laughed the stick-up man. "It ain't necessary," and he swung round and went out.

WHEN his dinner-time came around, Sam Smilax turned his faro-layout over to Salt River Sam and sauntered to Speedy Thurston's corner.

"Comin' out to feed, boss?" asked Sam.

Speedy shook his head.

"Can't leave here now, Sammy," he said. "Got to wait for that young stick-up chap."

"Where'd he blow to?" asked Sam.

"Went out to make a touch, Sammy," said Speedy, looking innocent as an old monk.

Sam looked blank and Speedy went on, dealing out the words as if they were pearls.

"I sort of introduced myself, Sam, and he didn't turn a hair. Kept his lip up and his eye open and pretty soon he says he feels obligated to square his conscience. Is coming back to refill that canvas bag he emptied."

"Who'll he touch in this place?" asks Sam. "Thought he was a stranger."

"Like as not it's a stranger he'll touch," grins Speedy. "He ain't partikerler."

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That rosy-faced old sinner winked first one and then the other eye.

"I see," says Sam, with a start. "He's gone out on a stick-up party. It's none o' my business, I suppose, Speedy Thurston, but I don't like it. Highway-robbery is a pretty confounded cheap game, —— cheap, and mostly cowards at it."

"That depends on who is stuck up," says Speedy, rubbing his nose. "I don't reckon he's a-goin' to rob children. He sizes up to me as about the nerviest cuss that ever come over that door-sill."

Sam Smilax didn't say any more, and went on out to his dinner. The notion began to take root in his brain then that he was taking lessons in the wrong school. He began to see S. P. Thurston in his proper light, as an amiable old rogue without scruple or conscience. Had he known at that minute that Speedy had loaned his (Sam's) precious pair of .38's to that black-eyed stick-up man his feelings would have been a prodigious sight stronger on the subject.

V

BY THE old key-winding gold turnip that had come to Speedy Thurston in the days he was winning fame as an Arizona bad-man and which bore the initials of a once celebrated geologist who had happened to be a passenger on a certain stage-coach which had been stopped on a high pass in the Dragoon Mountains by one masked man, it was just seventy minutes since the stick-up man had departed when Speedy's quick ear caught the padding thud of a pony's hoofs. In another instant the stick-up man came swiftly through the door, tottering a little in his steps and holding one hand pressed against his side.

His face was dull white when he got to where Speedy was sitting, but his voice didn't falter as he said, handing out a roll of bills in his free hand:

"This squares us, Thurston. I dug it out of the Black Pool saloon down by the railroad yards, and there was some shooting after I climbed aboard my pony. Good-by. I ain't got time to stop and gossip."

Before Speedy could pull up on his feet the stick-up man had left the Palace with the same headlong staggering speed with which he had entered. As Speedy approached the doorway there came to him a distant murmur of voices and crackle of revolvers. The volume of sound increased as he looked up the dark vista of road into which the stick-up man had vanished.

"That boy was hit all right," Speedy murmured to himself, then added, with a dry laugh, "but he's got a good start."

A DARK mass, barely discernible in the starlight, was coming swiftly toward the Palace—half a dozen galloping ponies, followed by a rabble on foot. The riders pulled up and shouted to Thurston:

"See a man on a brown pony go by, Speedy? He stuck up the Black Pool for five thousand. A dude in a silk shirt."

"Yes, I see him," yelled Speedy. "He stopped here for a drink—hit I guess—but he went the other way, Carson Sink road."

The little cavalcade wheeled and galloped off in the opposite direction from that taken by the stick-up man.

Crowds were surging on the street by this time and the Palace was soon thronged with excited men. A big, puffing, red-faced man began addressing the crowd in broken phrases:

"Nerviest customer ever saw. Come in and ordered drink at end of bar. Outs two guns and up goes twenty pairs of flippers. Safe is open—backs up to it, wavin' one gun—bends and grabs roll. Backs out and bumps into Sandy McNeil—plugs Sandy with his fist and jumps his horse. Sandy up, shooting, and thinks he's winged him. Cuss don't shoot back. Sandy McNeil is red ragin' and out for blood!"

Sandy McNeil—Brass-Fist Sandy McNeil—proprietor of the Black Pool, had started out for dinner just before the stick-up man arrived. He remembered sudden soon he'd left the safe open, which accounts for his quick return.

The excitement was pretty well on the ebb by the time Sam Smilax got back to the Palace. Pink Reagan had stopped him on the street to tell him of the stick-up man's achievement. Speedy Thurston beckoned to him as Sam went in.

"Hear about it, Sam?" said Speedy.

There was a tremor of hesitancy in the old scoundrel's voice.

Sam nodded his head.

"Well, he paid me back," said Speedy,

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getting up and leaning against the end of the bar.

Sam said nothing but looked hard into Speedy's face.

The old fellow's mouth twitched for a moment and then he blurted:

"But I'll have to split with you, Sam, as he's got your guns—those .38's."

Young Sam looked up and his face went livid.

"My guns!" he choked out. "My dad's .38's?"

"I'll make it good, Sammy," protested Thurston, recoiling before the blaze of passion in the boy's eyes. "Don't look at me like that," he almost whimpered, "we're friends, Sammy—good pals."

"And you give that stick-up man my guns?" Sam ground out. "Yes, you're a fine kind of friend. You knew what those guns meant to me."

"I know, Sammy," pleaded Thurston, "but I didn't give 'em to him. I loaned 'em, and they was empty. You see what he done with 'em empty, Sam. I was thinkin' o' you all the time. Honest to heaven, Sammy, I was thinkin' o' you—wanted to learn you a lesson in nerve. I——"

THERE was another outcry from the street and a sudden inrush of men.

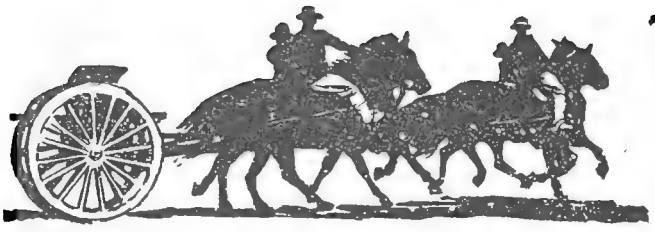
"They got him," cried one.

"Got his body," corrected another. "Dropped dead off his horse. Had been ridin' dead, I reckon, for there was a ball clear through him. Was shot makin' his getaway from the Black Pool—bullet in his side under his heart."

Sam Smilax turned slowly on Speedy Thurston, whose eyes seemed to have suddenly frozen and who was leaning heavily against the bar.

"So that's what you call a lesson in nerve," whipped out the boy. "I call it a lesson for mad dogs. You've been a good friend when I needed one, Speedy Thurston, but I got to quit your school. Good-by, Speedy. I'm—I'm going out and get back them guns o' dad's, somehow."

Sam left the old reprobate staring stupidly about him in the midst of a turmoil of voices that were crying additional details of how the stick-up man had ridden until his lifeless body had tumbled into the road.



The Song of The Rapid Fire

By

Charles Campbell Jones

HR-R-R-R-R-R-UMPH! Thus I grumble at the foe,
And I open lanes to glory as I wreak my will of them;
And I turn them back again to the land of missing men.
Hr-r-umph! Hr-rumph! Greeting, message, requiem.

Hr-r-r-r-r-r-umph! When they race across the dawn,
Howling mad with starkest frenzy, so I bid them, dying, stay;
I am Ruin's ticking clock—see them stagger with the shock.
Hr-r-umph! Hr-r-umph! They must dance and I will play.

Hr-r-r-r-r-r-umph! So I balk their wildest charge,
So I mow their ranks and drop them where they heard my warning song;
So I give them peace and rest—let them count it worst or best.
Hr-r-umph! Hr-r-umph! So I order Death along.

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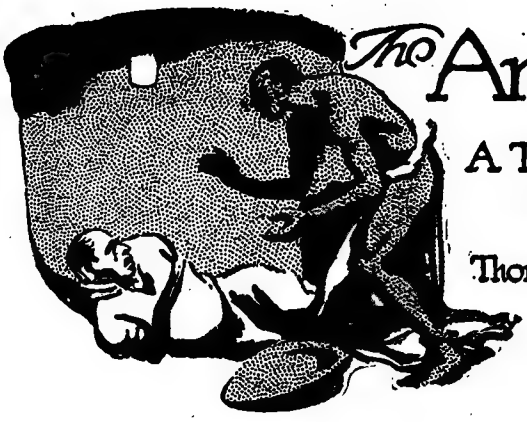

The Aro Mystery

A Tale of the West of Africa

by

Thomas Samson Miller

IF THE fanatical missionary had been less keen on poking his nose into hidden mysteries and getting himself lost in Aro, the City of Sins, Low would not have found himself stacked up against the jungle and failure. It had been easy to follow the trail of the Reverend Ebenezer Whortle to Abutshi, but thence it was as effectually lost as a stone thrown in the ocean. To all his inquiries about Aro, the superstitious natives shook their heads, muttering it was "bad fetish to make mouth about Aro."

It looked like failure and he had not yet tasted that bitter cup. Indeed, one could not drink twice of that draught and hold down the job of political officer of the company that had grabbed the Niger valleys.

But, just as he was about to consign Whortle to his fate, accident gave him guides to the very City of Sins itself. And that is the way in Africa, where expectations are never realized and inexpectations come like Christmas gifts.

A VILLAGER of Abutshi raised a cry of witchcraft against an old crone, saying she had cast a spell on his sick child. The negress vociferously denied a charge which meant hideous death, if proven. The case was put up to the village wizard, who mumbled over his charms, then gave sentence that accuser and accused should go to Aro and lay their case before the high tribunal of ju-juism.

Low had so far been an idly interested spectator in the dispute, but now he sat up and took notice; indeed, he could not do otherwise, for the decision was the signal for such lamentations as only the African in utter wo is capable of. A death-sentence itself could not have caused more consternation. But none disputed the wizardly authority, certainly not the victims, who at once turned their steps to the jungle and started a funeral-march.

Low stirred himself. Fortune had given him guides to the mysterious city of Aro and he lost no time in taking up their trail with ten raw Illorin gunmen, which a niggard policy had given him to try out, at the cost of much tribulation and perhaps life. The only satisfaction he derived from the hazard was that he was actually going to set eyes on Aro, and perhaps he, the obscure investigator of a trading-company, would have the honor of giving to the world the first authentic account of Aro.

What impressed him was the utter dejection of his unwilling guides, who gave no heed whatever to his following, but, stupored by their dread of the city that is only mentioned among the blacks of the Niger in a whisper, they dropped their heads, putting one foot automatically before the other in a definite direction that must have been known through some sixth sense, for the jungle was without tracks of any kind and the gloom was like a thick fog over an uncharted sea. There was something uncanny about the fatalism of the woman and her accuser that was quickly communicated to Low's gunmen, in turn reaching the political officer himself. In vain he tried to shake off a wretched foresense of some horror waiting ahead, in vain argued with himself that it was just the silence and gloom of the jungle disturbing his nervous system.

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Physically and psychologically, Low was keyed to meet the supernatural.

How far off was Aro? he asked "Five hours since Abutshi," said his watch.

And still the phantom guides stalked on, hand-in-hand, their quarrel forgotten in their mutual misery.

SUDDENLY Low raised his head, listening. From afar, or muffled though near, came a sound like—like what? Low asked himself.

He answered himself that it was like the sound of cups and saucers permeating the rustle of long gowns.

In vain he tried to locate its direction, getting mixed up between the original sound and the echoes of the glades. Almost he would have thought himself the victim of a perfervid imagination, if his gunmen had not been scared stiff.

He yelled at them, "Bushmen! March!" and started at his own voice, thrown back at him from all sides.

Every step brought the sound of cups and gowns nearer, until he could hold his excited curiosity no longer. Distinctly now he could distinguish the original sounds, so bidding his men to keep on the trail of the guides, he drew his revolver and set off cautiously to negotiate.

Scarcely a hundred paces brought to view something moving—human shapes strung out like a huge sea-serpent. Impelled by more than curiosity, he crept close, until he was able to see the individual shapes of negroes yoked in a long line, dragging heavy leg-chains, which clinked like teacups, while the shuffle of naked feet on dead leaves was like nothing so much as the rustle of gowns. On either side of the column were tall, swarthy men in turbans and burnooses, evidently men from Housaland. How came they there in the Niger Delta? and what was the meaning of that long line?

But he had no time to investigate or indulge in theories; he dared not leave his untried Illorin gunmen any length of time. Hurrying back, he reached them just in time to save disaster. Another minute and the simple fellows would have blindly followed the guides, perhaps into Aro itself, if the massed huts that centered on an open swamp was indeed the City of Sins.

Low halted them at the outcrop, under cover, while he brought a pair of field-glasses to bear on the reputed witch and her accuser.

The frightened wretches went direct toward the huts and, halting about a hundred yards from the village, raised their arms, chanting a rigmarole in dialect. Suddenly a third figure stood before them, whence coming and how, Low was unable to discover through the glasses. The third figure wore a mask and a strange kind of cloak. Before him the two wretches fell prone. Then the one in the mask evidently went prone with them, an ant-hill cutting off Low's vision.

He patiently waited their reappearance, but waited in vain. Not wishing to expose himself and alarm the city, he determined to wait until the already setting sun had dropped over the jungle and then reconnoiter. For the first time in the adventure, he really warmed up. If he was looking on Aro, then he was looking on something no white had ever seen, unless perhaps the simple missionary, who had probably seen more than was good for him and was either a prisoner or else had long since suffered the fate of the inquisitive when they attempt to penetrate the curtain of superstition that veils the hidden mysteries of Negroland.

The moment the crimson died out of the west, Low bade his trembling Illorins to remain under cover, and stole forth, intending first of all to investigate the disappearance at the ant-hill. To his chagrin he found several ant-hills and in the dark was unable to locate the particular one. All this while the huts were merged in a silence as deep as the grave. He was tempted to investigate the city itself, but found himself blocked by open water that completely surrounded the village, like a moat dug round a castle for defense.

Something moved in the water, silently, uncannily. He shuddered. Suddenly a light showed among the huts. A figure passed with a grass torch, then other figures, each hidden by a coconut mask and long cloak of coconut fiber. They moved silently, stopping before each hut to chalk a mark—a death-mark perhaps, was his gruesome thought.

But it was no good standing there—he was just as far away from the rescue of Ebenezer Whortle and the mystery of Aro as if he had never set out on the dare. How to get in there, and how to get out when in? Swim the water?—ugh!

There must be a canoe somewhere, he

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thought, and again walked right around, without discovering a single means of crossing. The only alternative seemed to point to the strange disappearance at the ant-hill.

He set out to carefully scrutinize the ground around the many ant-hills. Five he thus searched, then the sixth brought discovery. His feet suddenly sank. Quickly recovering, he went down on his knees and felt around. His hands came in contact with a hollowed cylinder, which he soon made out to be a giant mahogany hollowed out by fire, large enough to admit the passage of a man. In a flash it came to him that four, perhaps five, mahoganies, placed end to end, would make a subterranean tube under the water to the huts.

For a moment he hesitated, but the chance was too great to let pass. It was night now and he had the darkness for cover, whereas on the morrow the presence of himself and his ten men might become known and extra precautions taken against surprise.

It was a dare—a tremendous risk, but, without it, how was he to discover the mystery of Aro? True he might openly attack with his doubtful Illorins, but he had no idea what opposition he would meet, and it was certain that, if the missionary was in there, he would be sacrificed at the first shot.

IT took courage to enter the foul air of the passage with the knowledge that, if discovered, he could be drowned like a rat in a trap, but the situation called for desperate courage and it was no time now to weigh the chances. With a last look at the stars, he plunged all-fours into the hole and drew himself painfully along on his elbows.

Presently he saw light through the bore of the passage and soon found himself at the other end, peering into a large room lighted by a cotton wick in a saucer of nut-oil. Looking cautiously around, he convinced himself that the room was untenanted, and squirmed from the mahogany. On the floor he saw several coconut masks and fiber cloaks, evidently placed there for new arrivals at Aro to put on.

This was a great stroke of good fortune, as it gave him a complete disguise for mingling with the inhabitants. Quickly donning the grotesque cos'ume, he started for the door, when he heard voices incanting and murmuring on the other side of the reed walls.

Making a small hole, he peered on a curious scene. Some dozen or so masked and cloaked figures were gathered round something on the floor which had excited their superstitious awe. Just then the man obstructing his view stood aside and, with a start of surprise, he discovered that the object of their curiosity and reverence was nothing but a pocket-compass.

With difficulty, he repressed a cry at this unexpected picking up of the trail of the missionary, and watched the antics of the Africans, who were mystified at the obstinacy with which the needle pointed north. In a less tense situation the absurdity of their wise shakings of their heads and muttered incantations would have moved him to laughter, but just now his wits were working under high pressure. The question was how long they would keep up their mummery, or dared he trust to his disguise to slide unnoticed among them and wait his chance to escape to the outside huts? To take hazards was become almost second nature with him, as it becomes with any one who has much dealing with savages. Without second thought, he watched his chance and, when they all had their faces over the compass, he quietly joined them, and the next moment just as quietly left them, gaining the open air. What next?

So far he had acted from volition rather than from method or planning, but now he found himself actually in the City of Sins in a disguise which so far had proven its value beyond his best hopes. He felt he could indulge the luxury of mentally summing up his discoveries and deducing a working-theory.

The first question was, what relationship existed between the column of manacled blacks and Aro? Judging from their direction, they had undoubtedly come from the City of Sins, and, in view of the meager accommodations of the huts, must have left the village almost depleted. Might it not be best to smuggle his Illorins through the tube into the city and make a bold capture? he queried.

But he immediately answered himself that the Illorins were too cowardly to be depended upon. No, he must play a lone hand.

Was he really in Aro, or was this a halfway place to that notorious hotbed of superstition? That would account for the manacled column. Well, the first necessity was

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to ascertain if the missionary were in the village. Fortunately, Low had speaking acquaintance with most of the dialects of the Niger and was not afraid to accost any black in his own tongue.

Scarcely had he reached this decision when a mask and gown approached and addressed him.

"Is the mysterious Power discovered?" the newcomer asked.

Instantly, Low connected the question with the compass, and answered in the negative.

His inquisitor responded with valuable information.

"I have spoken all day with the white man, but he will not reveal the source of the mysterious Power. If you will come with me, Masked One, we will have sport with him."

"I follow thee, Masked One." Low quickly took the cue to the form of address from the other's mouth.

SCARCELY able to conceal his eagerness, he accompanied the man to a hut, where a figure in mask and cloak humped on the floor in utter abandonment to dejection, preparing in a calabash a mess of mealies and pepper.

To Low's complete surprise his guide addressed the figure in pigeon-English:

"Ho, white prophet, I come again to make talk with you."

The figure raised its head, speaking plaintively:

"Why do you torment me, Ogo?"

"*Mister* Ogo," the black corrected, adding viciously, "When I was your servant you made me say *Mister*, and now you are my servant you shall say *Mister* to me, or I will feed you dried rat and nail-parings, which make you plenty sick."

A spasm of rage shook Low at this degradation of a white and it was only by an effort of will that he kept his hands off the ex-servant's throat. He had fairly to force himself to keep from spoiling all chance of rescuing the missionary, who was evidently too hopelessly cowed to attempt escape alone. Perforce he had to listen to a dialogue that sent the blood leaping through his veins with mad rage. Ogo demanded of the missionary that he tell of the mysterious Power of the whites. The missionary answered dejectedly,

"I have told you again and again there is no mysterious Power."

The answer enraged the black. He thrust his masked face against the other's, hissing out his words:

"You lie. There is a Power by which the whites come and lord it over the blacks. They have strange lights on the big ships that come to the port. Their guns are magic and they drink this secret Power from small bottles, so that when they say to the black 'Do this' or 'Do that' it is done. But without this Power the whites are no better than the blacks. Did not the Good Ju-ju [God] in the beginning call before him a black and a white and point to a calabash and a book, saying first to the black, 'Choose.' Now that fool black man chose the calabash, whereby he got all the good things of this world. But the white took the book, which is the source of secret power, so what good is the black man's choice when the white has the power to take the good things from him? Everybody done know this. Very well, if we blacks can learn the power, we soon be boss and the white man slave. So I go to missionary school to discover the Power. But they fool me; they teach me the Power is in book called Bible. That is a lie; the Power is in book called Science, which you would not show me. Of Science is the little devil-machine whose finger always points one way, though the wizards make fetish against. By it the white man finds his way wherever he wants to go. By it you found your way to Aro, though I could have shown you. When I saw you meant to go to Aro, I laughed; for thus you must come into my power, you and your devil-machines. Now will you tell me the Power?" he hissed.

The missionary shrank back to the wall, crying out,

"I speak the truth; I have not the Power. You must go to white man's country and learn science."

"You lie!" the negro screamed, and struck the missionary's mask such a blow that he toppled over.

II

THAT was the signal for the loosing of Low's rage. He caught the African by the throat, but owing to the fiber coat could not get a throttling grip. The black was powerful and practised in the clutch. They lashed round the

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hut, then rolled over the floor, not as humans, but as brute beasts in death-struggle. Low called to the missionary, but the frightened wretch cowered against the wall, wringing his hands.

What Low feared was the black's outcries, for, try as he would, he could not throttle the man through the coconut fiber. In his heat he flung a remark at the missionary that stung the man to action:

"You trouble-maker, haven't you any pluck at all?"

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth before the missionary was out of his corner in a panther leap, and pressing mealies and pepper into the man's distended jaws with both hands. His sudden ferocity was horrible, and told, as no words could have done, the torment he had suffered at the hands of his valet.

In vain the black tried to swallow the stuff. The missionary crowded the mash in without pause until his victim suddenly ceased his struggles and lay in an awful quiet.

They dragged the body into a dark corner. Then the missionary spoke,

"Who are you?—you speak like a white."

"I am Job Low, whose parents meant me to be a missionary, but good fortune made political officer of the chartered company."

"But, my God, how come you in Aro?"

"By the tube. But the question is, how to get out?"

"But I don't understand why you are here."

"I'm here to get you out," Low answered shortly, adding, "Come, get into action before this black is discovered, or recovers. We've got to get to that tube and safety. The passage is unguarded, thank God."

But the missionary quickly undeceived him.

"Unguarded for *entrance* to Aro, but guarded against *exit*."

"Great Scott! what a fool I was!" Low apostrophized himself. "I thought I was making a slick entry, when I was simply running into a set trap. For Heaven's sake, tell me what it all means—what is Aro? why is Aro?"

Whortle glanced at the unconscious black before answering, but as the man gave no sign of life he briefly explained the mystery that has long baffled explorers:

"Aro is the holy of holies of ju-juism and the last appeal of all the tribes. If a negro offends the canons of ju-juism or falls under suspicion of witchcraft, or steals, quarrels and a hundred other things, he is sent to Aro to be adjudged and——"

Low broke in with a question:

"But if all the tribes send their offenders in these things, Aro would be choked up in a day. What becomes of them?"

"Hush, for God's sake!" groaned Whortle. "Don't ask me that—anything but that."

Seeing that the missionary was laboring under some great excitement, Low for the present let the question pass, jumping to the thing uppermost in his mind:

"How do the victims gain admittance?"

"By the passage. They come to the edge of the death-water——"

"Death-water?" Low interrupted again.

"The ditch round the village."

"Why death-water?"

"Oh, for God's sake don't ask me these things. You'll learn—ah, to your cost you will learn, before you have been here long."

"Go on with your story. The victims come to the moat, and——" Low prompted.

"And make a given signal, whereupon a wizard goes to them and conducts them through the passage. Or some are already informed of the way when their own village-wizard sent them, for each village has a wizard in league with the devils here. These enter the passage and come out in the mask-and-gown room, where they put on the dress which clothes every man in Aro, so that one does not know wizard from victim and dares not talk or plan escape. They enter unchallenged; but they never leave, except by——"

He broke off, shuddering.

Again Low repressed himself and let the mystery remain, coming to the more practical question as to whether Whortle had attempted escape.

"Attempt escape!" cried the missionary. "How?"

"The ditch is easily swum."

"Swim—that—ditch! You do not know what you are saying. Come. I will show you as devilish an invention as was ever devised by savage minds in league with the Evil One. But wait. Is there a mark on this hut?" he asked with chattering teeth. "Is there a mark of shackled feet done in red ochre?"

"I saw none."

"Thank God for that. Come on. We are free to go about the streets, unless the

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mark is on our hut, when we have to stay in and wait our call."

"Your call? Call to what?"

"To worse than death. Don't speak of it. Come on. I will show you why no victim of Aro ever attempts escape by the water," Whortle answered, in the fateful tone of a prisoner who has given up hope.

Low tried to put heart into him as they went down the hut-lanes, but the missionary shook his head and pointed to the sign of chained legs marked in red on several huts, whining.

"There are only two routes from Aro, one by that sign and the other—— But wait until we come to the ditch."

LOW persisted, knowing that a disheartened man was poor support. He told of the ten gunmen he had left in the jungle and tapped his side to show Whortle he had a revolver.

But all the missionary said was, "Wait!"

Low gave up, sloughing along in uncanny silence across the little village, until they came to the black chasm of the ditch.

There was something dreadful about that black water, which, strangely, showed no reflection of the stars and was so still that it might have been a sheet of black ice. In his gruesome curiosity he got a little ahead of the missionary, and was about to step to the edge of the ditch, when the latter flung out a hand and gripped his arm, yanking him back with an exclamation of horror.

"For God's sake!"

"What's the danger?"

"Can you not see? Look hard at the surface of the water."

Low strained his eyes. Presently, he made out several solid substances lying like logs in the water. He took up a stick and threw it in the middle. Instantly the shapes sank out of sight. In a flash he knew the wicked scheme that safeguarded escape from Aro. The ditch was crowded with crocodiles, undoubtedly kept with a proper hunger for victims. He drew back, with an exclamation of horror.

"My——! Come away. We do no good here, and I don't want you unnerved, for we have to make our escape to-night, unless we put your ex-servant out of the way, and, hate him as I do, I have no stomach for cold murder. Are you sure the tube is guarded?"

"Positive. There are never less than a dozen men in the first room leading to the entrance to the passage."

"Ah, yes, I saw them poring over your compass. I must do some thinking. Let's get back to your hut—that nigger must not come to and raise an outcry. There are a hundred things I have to ask you, but they can wait."

The missionary made chattering answer:

"Yes, if we escape it must be to-night, for to-morrow the call may come."

"What call?"

"The call to living death."

"Oh, —— your living deaths! I've been in tighter places, and I wish you'd answer straight sense. But never mind. We won't be here for the call, if my head is in working order. Let me think."

His chin sank on his chest, until they reached the hut and Whortle was about to pass in, when Low flung up his head like one who saw hope, and caught the missioner's arm.

"Listen. I see a chance, if you will keep your nerve and act quickly. For myself, I have no fear of being able with my gun to reach the tube, but *you?*"

Whortle piped in a sudden nerve panic,

"I suffer limb-paralysis at any excitement. I have marsh-fever in my bones and lose all control over my muscles at the least excitement."

"If you will follow out my instructions, there will be no excitement for you. I'll shoulder that end of the game. Now listen. Is there any reason why we should not quietly mingle with the men in the room that guards the passage? I mean, should we be recognized?"

"I think not. All Aro wears one dress."

"Good. Listen carefully, then. I have a steel pocket-knife and I am going to play ju-ju, which is to say, work magic with the compass-needle. Now you watch your chance, when I have them all mesmerized with wonder, to slip in the hole. The moment you are safely in, I'll be after you, with my gun doing more magic with any wizard who tries to stop me! Get a grip on yourself! ——, for a flask of brandy! But think, Whortle, if you lose this chance you may never get another. You may have to answer that 'call' that seems to scare you stiff at the very mention of it. Now—ready. Keep at my side and play silent partner. Watch me with the wizards and edge toward the hole. Slip into it the

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moment I lift my left hand to my mask in signal. You understand?"

"Y-e-s—b-but I can never carry it through," chattered the missionary.

"Then all the worse for you, for I mean to get out of this Stygian nest of devils tonight or die in the attempt. But, Great Scott! what's that?"

He threw up his head, listening, and cried out,

"It's my men in the jungle, firing. They won't have a cartridge left! They are up against something I can't conceive, but I know that without leadership they haven't got a chance. That cinches it. We've got to make our getaway right now. Come on. Keep close," he cautioned, hurrying for the house where the only light in Aro shone through loosely-woven reed walls.

As he went in he whispered to Whortle,

"Keep your nerve! Watch for my signal. Remember, failure is death!",

III

HE went in with his right hand pushed through his robe to his revolver. But the wizards paid no heed to him, every face being bent over the compass. Boldly forcing a place among them, he drew forth a pocket-knife, and opening the large blade began to draw it round the compass, the needle, of course, following the magnetism of the steel.

Had he fired a bomb, the terror and surprise could not have been greater. The wizards drew back in horror, but he drew them on with a statement in their dialect that he had discovered the secret Power from the white man. Thus he mesmerized them with his play with the knife and compass.

Suddenly he raised his left hand to his mask, and from the corner of his eye saw Whortle standing stiff, staring at him, utterly incapable of moving hand or foot.

The sweat began to pour down his face; he could not hold the wizards much longer; but what to do? He recalled a box of snuff he carried when his duties took him through malarial districts.

Secretly slipping his hand through the coarse weave of his robe, he reached the box and took a generous pinch, which he tossed in the air with an upward fling of his arm, as he had noted the wizards flung up their arms when they muttered a certain incantation. The next moment they were all sneezing.

Low watched Whortle anxiously. Suddenly the missionary sneezed violently and his paralyzed limbs moved.

Low flung out, "Go."

The missionary leaped to the room of the masks and gowns, and Low saw his own chance, right there, while the blacks were sneezing. He jumped behind Whortle, but not before a wizard sensed his intention and threw himself in his path, only to get a stunning fist-blow.

They came at him in a bunch, but he had his gun out and barking. The fall of the first man and the surprise of it halted the others, and before they had recovered, Low was in the hole, his face close to Whortle's heels.

Not till he was out in the swamp did he breathe free of the fear of drowning through some contrivance for flooding the pipe.

The moment he stood up, he grasped the missionary's arm, hurrying him across the swamp, anxious to learn what had happened to his men, for an ominous silence had succeeded the firing.

At the same time, the uncanny quiet of the village was broken with wild yells, and the masked figures poured from the mahogany tube like rats from a sewer, each man with an assagai. Low found himself between two troubles, and an impotent missionary on his hands. All this time he kept running toward the place where he had left the Illorins, surprised at neither seeing nor hearing anything of them.

Thus he arrived at the jungle—suddenly stumbling on his gunmen, squatted peaceably on their haunches round a fire. He sprang at the head-man.

"What's the trouble? Who attacked you?"

"No one attacked, sah," the man replied.

"I heard you firing."

"We fired lest our powder get wet."

"W-h-a-t?"

"The night dew was heavy, sah, and we were afraid our powder would get wet, so we fired."

"W-h-a-t! why—oh, you bushmen!" he cried in his exasperation, for in their idiotic notion they had deprived him of all defense against the coming wizards.

There was nothing for it but to run, trusting to his revolver to pick off a leader now and again, when the pursuit got too warm.

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But he reckoned without the Aro wizards' superstition. When they heard again the "magic" gun and saw their foremost man drop dead, they turned and fled for Aro.

It had been a strenuous night for Low, and his muscles called out for rest, so he ordered camp. Tired as he was, his curiosity had to be satisfied regarding certain mysteries of the City of Sins.

He flung hot questions at the exhausted missionary:

"What was that 'call' you feared? What happened to all the blacks who have gone to Aro these many decades? What is the meaning of Aro, the reason for its deviltry?"

But Whortle was suddenly cunning, answering grandiloquently, "*I*, sir, *I* give to the world the mystery of Aro in my published book."

Low lost his temper. To dare that foul mahogany tube, to trust his life among the fanatics, to face cruel torture, all for the missionary's sake, and then to be turned down this way by the ungrateful simpleton, was more than his worn nerves could stand.

He planted himself before the man, speaking impressively:

"LISTEN, Mister Reverend Ebenezer Whortle — listen carefully. You have put me to considerable trouble to save your carcass and you owe me something. If you were a gentleman, I would not remind you of the obligation, but you are a puppy with an exaggerated ego, looking forward to the hero-worship of pink-tea coteries and mission-audiences. But I, too, have a story to tell, of a fool who thrust himself blindly into the hotbed of superstition and was made to play valet to a negro whom any trader on the Niger would have sized up for a rascal on sight. To your book I will add an appendix regarding the fright-paralyzed fool I saved at the risk of my life, only to be answered in your pleasant little manner. Now you and I have to come to an understanding. I want answers to my questions, for I believe there exists behind this mummery of superstition some more practical object in enticing the Africans to Aro. I scent a plot whereby the wizards are growing rich at the expense of the poor blacks. Understand, I do not ask out of mere idle curiosity, but in my responsibility as political officer of the company. I don't care a hang about your book, but I do care to carry out my instructions, which were to discover the mystery of Aro. Now you have artfully shelved my questions all along with shudderings and mysteries, but you and I are now to come to an understanding, or *back you go to Aro.*"

Whortle cried out at that, "You would not dare?"

"As sure as my mother is a white woman, if you do not come through with straight answers to what I want to know, back you go to Aro. For the last time, what do you mean by the 'call'? You said, back there in the village, that there were only two routes out: one by the 'call,' but the other you would not tell, being too scared—or so I thought at the time, but now I see you were thinking of your precious book and cheap honors. Go to it!"

Whortle shrank back from the investigator's flashing indignation, but no longer attempted to evade the issue.

"Since you are in a position to force me to tell what I meant to breathe to no one until my book was on the market, I must perforce speak. Perhaps I had better tell the whole story, to make it clearer. Please, would you mind looking the other way? You frighten me. I swear I will tell everything, only please look the other way . . . Thank you. Now, to begin at the beginning. The Lord called me to overthrow the idols of ju-juism and destroy the power of the wizards, to which end I spoke with Ogo, who was a baptized mission-pupil and one I trusted, though several traders warned me. But I imputed their warnings to their prejudice against the missioned negro and would not be turned from my purpose, especially as Ogo had often told me of the horrors of Aro, to entice me into his trap, as I now see. Not suspecting he was an agent of the wizards, I enlisted the aid of the C. M. S.—the Church Missionary Society—to furnish me with means for a modest expedition to Aro. Arriving at Abutshi, I was led into a trap and carried to Aro, where I soon discovered Ogo's treachery, and his purpose, which was to torture from me a secret Power they believed the whites possessed. One of his tortures was to make me eat loathsome foods, but the worst was his threat to have me 'called.' He told me there were only two ways out of Aro, one by 'call,' the other by the death-water, which meant being thrown to the voracious

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crocodiles, as they threw all the aged and decrepit, reserving the able-bodied for the 'call.' When I asked Ogo what he meant by the 'call,' he took me to a hut and showed me the chained-leg sign, saying:

"'Thus you shall be called to the slave-gang. Whip-masters will drive you through forlorn countries to Timbuctoo, where you will become the slave and sport of some ruffian Tawarek.' In an instant I saw that the whole diabolical plot of the wizards of Aro was nothing but a secret slave-market, though the company have always denied slavery within their sphere-of-influence."

"Ah!" cried Low, "it's good we talked before you went home with that yarn, for by the time you get your precious book on the market it will be discounted by a wiping out of this hornets' nest of wizards. Indeed, if my fools had not fired away their ammunition to keep it dry, I'd have a try right now; but as it is, the company will have to send a few rifles against the city. But what a scheme! It has always been a mystery how the slave-markets of Western Sudan were supplied, but now it is as clear as day, and I promise great success for your book, Mr. Whortle, especially if you do full justice to *Mister* Ogo and his quest of the Secret Power. I must get the news to the agent-general without loss of time. Come on, Whortle, and you bushmen—march! and don't cut off your legs to save them getting tired, you idiots!"

Scrappy Garlin Interferes.

by Charles C. Lofquest

"SAY, this is the limit—and then some!" snorted Monte Burke, sole owner of the Great Monte Burke Circus, wiping the coffee out of his mustache.

"Somebody slipping you something?" I asked him, as he looked up from the letter he was reading.

Monte threw the letter down again and went back to his ham and eggs. It wasn't difficult to see that this epistle, which Hunky Hines, one of the waiters, had brought to the boss while he and I were eating breakfast in the grub-tent, was spoiling his appetite. He snatched it up again and, as he read it over for the second time, his green eyes blazed with rage.

"Baldy," he said, "do you remember Dan Garlin—Scrappy Garlin?"

"Do I remember Scrappy Garlin! What, that fellow with our show, years ago—the tough card-shark who ran your keno game—the plug-ugly who hit me over the head with a bottle when he thought I was switching loaded dice on him?"

As I ran my finger down the five-inch scar on my forehead, Monte nodded.

"It's years since I fired Scrappy," he mused.

"You ain't pining for his company, are you?"

Monte sneered savagely, his lips curling over his stubby, broken teeth in a way that wasn't pretty to look at.

"Aw, I'd like to——" he snarled, stopping. "Just see what Billy Roach, our fixer, writes."

I picked up the letter and read the following:

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DEAR MONTE:

I'm writing in haste to warn you of trouble at Horsehead. Prospects for a big crowd are good, but I don't know if the burg will stand for your gambling layout. The sheriff lives in Horsehead, and there's one constable. Sheriff Stubbins is easy. He thinks we can get the constable to shut his eyes for a few dollars, but says the fellow we must watch out for is a man named Bickett, the big squeeze in the saw-works. And here's where the joke comes in.

You see I was ready to leave Horsehead for Willham when who does I run across but Scrappy Garlin, that tough fellow who worked your keno years ago.

"Hello, Burke," says he, "so Monte's coming to Horsehead?" "You bet," says I.

"Does Monte run the same crooked old layout?" he asked. "Yes," I answers, "and some smooth new ones, too."

"Is he planning to run the layout here in Horsehead?" "Why, sure," says I, "everything's all right here, except some nosey fool, Bickett's his name, but he can't stop us."

"You tell Monte he must cut out his rotten flim-flams when he shows this town," says Scrappy. "The men around here have no money to be robbed of!"

I was knocked off my feet by his talk. "Back to the pines, Scrappy Garlin," I said. "Excuse me, Billy," he came back, "I'm known here as Bickett —Dan Bickett."

So you see, Monte, the fellow the sheriff warned me about is our old Scrappy, and he's superintendent in the big saw-works. Can you beat it? It's lucky I didn't tell him I had the sheriff fixed.

Yours truly,
BILLY ROACH

As I handed back Roach's letter, I wanted to laugh—the idea of Scrappy superintending anything bigger than a peanut-stand was too stupefying!

"Well, what are you going to do?" I asked Monte.

"Ever see me lay down?"

"No, but Scrappy's a bad actor when he gets started."

"I'll run my games at Horsehead full blast in spite of Mr. Scrappy Bickett—or ——!" Monte swore, jumping to his feet. He stood glaring at me, his stiff Stetson slanted over one eye, a tattooed hand on each hip. "It's the nerve of this guy I once fired, telling me what I can and what I can't do, that gets my goat—makes my blood boil. Well, it's me to dope this thing out. Coming, Baldy?"

"No, *sir!*" I answered emphatically, giving Hunky the high sign for more coffee. "No Scrappy for mine, please!"

MAND, believe me, I meant precisely what I said, too. As treasurer of the Great Monte Burke Circus, I had run across some bad men, but Scrappy was the worst I ever met, nor is there a better place anywhere for meeting bad men than with a small tent-show. For, despite its high-sounding name, Monte's circus was only a two-ring affair. Monte, an old three-card man, had for years been carrying a notoriously crooked gambling-layout. Consequently, he had to be careful not to reappear in a town he had ever exhibited in before.

This season Monte had struck off into the northern lumber-towns, and a right ripe harvest he was reaping. No doubt it seems like a wonder, but Monte had not been arrested since we broke winter-quarters. Of course this spoke badly for the officials in the towns where we showed, but it also proved what a clever fixer our Billy Roach was. But I figured Monte was due for trouble at Horsehead—unless Scrappy had changed a lot since I had seen him last.

"Anyhow," said I to myself, sauntering out of the grub-tent, "it's two weeks before we show Horsehead—and it ain't my funeral."

I crossed the lot to the ticket-wagon and, inside, found Monte and Flynn, the side-show spieler, talking earnestly.

"Here's Baldy; let's ask him," spoke up Monte. "What do you think of sending Flynn to Horsehead to fix that constable before Scrappy can block us?"

"And find out how Scrappy himself stacks up," put in Flynn.

"But Scrappy must be strong in Horsehead, for Roach writes he is superintendent in the saw-works," I remarked. "They don't hand a job like that to a dead one."

"Yes, but he's changed his name to Bickett," argued Flynn.

"Exactly! He's flying false colors," exclaimed Monte. "Now does Horsehead know he was once Scrappy Garlin?"

"It's a cinch Horsehead doesn't," grinned Flynn.

"Would you really spring his old record on them?" I asked.

"Would I—really!" Monte mocked me. "I'll do more; I'll kick him back in the mud where he came from, the dirty dog. Superintendent Daniel Bickett! Flynn, skip up to Horsehead and join us in Sharrock, and, mind you, land that constable!"

After Flynn left, I stood gazing out across the show-lot, where the center poles still rose naked against the sky. Monte chewed his cigar-stub and made a pretense of

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looking at the canvas-gang lacing the roof of the big top together. But out of the corner of his eye he was watching me, defying me to say something. Then all at once he swore an oath and flung off the wagon, banging the door after him. Yes, trouble was brewing!

Before Monte and I again discussed Scrappy we were at Dumbly Falls, our next stand. As we checked the afternoon receipts he remarked casually,

"Ain't talked about Scrappy since yesterday, have we?"

"And we won't now, if I can help it," I retorted.

He wanted to know why.

"I've been your treasurer, Monte, since you started in the show-game," I told him, "but that don't signify I've got to applaud everything you do."

"Meaning what — particularly?" he frowned.

"Your gambling-layout, for the first thing. Some of your games are just short of highway robbery. It's time you made kindling of your layout, Monte, and broke into the three-ring class, where there's clean money and lots of it."

"Huh, same old kick!" He stopped to bite off a chew of tobacco. "Well, don't you forget it, when I hit Horsehead my games are going to run wide open!"

THAT was as far as we got at Dumbly Falls and at our next stand Monte only remarked, as we were pulling out at night for Sharrock, that he was anxious to hear from Flynn. What actually took place between Monte and Flynn at Sharrock I don't know, but about dusk Flynn limped into the ticket-wagon. He had a pair of blackened eyes and a battered lip, and handed me a slip that read:

BALDY:

Give this simp all he's got due in wages. Don't forget $15 poker bill he owes me. Have somebody kick him off the lot. MONTE

"That's short and crisp," I said, passing him his month's wages. "What's the row?"

"Monte put the brass knuckles to me up in the hotel," answered Flynn indignantly. "Mind you, I'm only tellin' him Bickett—Scrappy I mean—is well known in Horsehead. I'm tellin' Monte, mind you, how Scrappy came there years ago and kept workin' up, until now he's their leading citizen. I'm tellin' him how when the lumber-jacks wasn't workin', Scrappy gives them free soup. But Monte never gives me a chance to finish. That free-soup stuff stuck in his crop. Biff! Biff! He pastes me with his fist-irons. 'Did I ask you to root up that kind of bunk!' Monte yells, smashin' me."

Although this sounded just like Monte, I wanted to put a question or two to Monte myself. For I was sure something must have gone wrong. But I didn't see Monte all day.

"Have you paid off Flynn?" he grunted, at dinner, the following day.

I replied that I had, asking,

"Why did you fire him?"

"Thought you wanted to be let out of this Scrappy business?" he flared. "Well, stay out!"

I didn't care to quarrel with Monte. But his air of mystery goaded my curiosity—not that I cared much to know what he was doing about the games at Horsehead. The gossip of possible trouble had spread through the whole show. Everybody was talking about it, and asking questions. The night we finally started for Horsehead the privilege-car was jammed, and all hands looked excitedly forward to the morrow.

IT WAS daylight when we pulled into the town. There was the usual crowd to watch us unload—frowsy, heavy-handed lumber-jacks. The place had a busy look, with its many houses, spires, stores and the big saw-works perched on the bank of a swift river full of black rocks and crazy currents.

Leaving the sleeper, I walked slowly through the crowd. A window in the talent's sleeper was pushed open and Monte leaned out, making a flash like a corner window in Maiden Lane. He was sporting his plug hat and had put on all his loud clothing and jewelry. The jacks sized him up guardedly, sneaking oblique looks at each other. Then Monte saw me and called, and the crowd fell back as I went to him.

"What do you think of Scrappy's town?" he asked.

Before I could answer, however, up stepped Hamlin, our Twenty-Four Hour Man, who should have been at Willham, smoothing the way at our next stand.

"It's all right, Monte," he said hurriedly. "I've seen the constable. He's gone fishing."

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"Bully!" declared Monte. "Why couldn't Flynn do that? How about the sheriff?"

"Left yesterday for Still Cut, fifteen miles north, where he'll have important business until we're gone."

After Hamlin had rushed away to catch a freight accommodation for Willham, Monte came out of the car, pausing on the platform to sweep his eye over the crowd.

"Baldy," he said, "this town's going to run wide open to-day. Watch me lift the lid."

He swung on his heel, facing the crowd.

"Good morning, gents!" he exclaimed, tipping his stove-pipe to the jacks.

The frowsy crowd stared suspiciously and rolled their quids.

"Is there a place in your city where a man can get an eye-opener?" Monte asked, with a killing wink.

"Sure," yelled some one, "but Ike ain't opened yet."

"What, five after five and no relief for the weary!" groaned Monte.

There was a roar of laughter, and then an explanation that the saloon was not allowed to open until seven o'clock.

"That's tough, boys," proceeded Monte. "I wanted to treat you."

"Were you figgering on treatin' us *all?*" asked a jack.

"Sure; where's Ike's place?"

Every man in the crowd tried to answer. Monte lifted his high hat again, exultation beaming in his crafty eye.

"Say, boys," he shouted over the confusion, "let's wake Ike."

Here was a stunner for the jacks. They grinned sheepishly and nudged each other.

"Come on, gents," Monte shouted, jumping for the car. "Get a hooker on me."

Off he dashed, with that wild-eyed pack shuffling at his heels. He kept shouting at them until they stopped in front of a frame building at the head of a street. I gathered that Ike, the barkeeper, lived up-stairs. After a while a window opened and a sullen-looking man stuck his head out.

"Wotcher want, anyhow?" he asked, laying a double-barreled gun on the sill beside him. "You all know I can't open until seven."

"Good morning, Bright Eyes," spoke up Monte, stepping forward. "I'm sole owner of the Great Monte Burke Circus, and I've invited these gents to wet their whistles with me. Now rustle out of your pyjammers and get busy!"

Ike glowered unpleasantly, but he was counting noses.

"All right, I'll take the chance," he announced.

While they were waiting for Ike, I went over to Monte.

"What's the answer to all this?" I asked. "You haven't any money to buy onyx barfixtures for Ike, have you?"

"Baldy, when I get through with this village," he confided jubilantly, "they won't know what money looks like!"

THERE wasn't room for more than a third of the crowd in Ike's place, but the rest filed by the bar and got their drinks. Ike had to run a bung into a fresh barrel, and the jacks cheered Monte loud and long. It was highly profitable to Ike, but he ceased pouring long enough to request that the cheering be postponed until after seven o'clock.

"Why?" demanded Monte, who was standing up on a chair.

"He's scared stiff of our superintendent," grinned a jack, with a hoarse laugh which was taken up by the others.

"Shut up, Mister Mouthey," shouted Ike, reddening.

"Well, you are leery of Mr. Bickett," insisted the jack.

Monte tilted his plug hat and listened to the argument.

"You see, Mr. Burke," explained Ike, "this Bickett closed up four of us here. Can't tell when he'll be after my pelt."

Here, evidently, was the opening for which Monte had been waiting.

"I'm told," he said, "this Bickett party has picked himself to see you gents don't get too gay—he doesn't want you to have any more fun than he thinks is plenty. Well, who is Brother Bickett, to pull off any stunt like that? Who is he himself?"

Monte let this soak into the jacks. This line of talk was sacred music to Ike, who bobbed his head up for an earful as often as his pouring would permit.

"And you fellows stand for Bickett's stuff!" sneered Monte. "You slave for him all day, and then you let him tell you how to spend your money. Is that right?"

"That's what I want to know," demanded Ike.

"I knew you gents wanted to see the

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greatest show in the world, with the usual trimmings," went on Monte. "So I put Horsehead on my route. What happened? Well, my advance-man, Billy Roach, came here and this Bickett buttonholed him. 'Don't you run any gambling games here,' said he. Does he think you can play ring-around-a-rosy all your lives!"

Monte had gestured himself into a lather and now he certainly had the fixed attention of every jack.

"But Brother Bickett has roped the wrong steer this time. My games are going to run wide open. I know this Bickett party. Surprises you, eh? Well, I knew him long before he came to Horsehead. I'll tell you all the story of his rotten life. Come to the show-grounds and hear it. I'm going to pull the mask off him——"

"Cheese it!" groaned Ike suddenly.

Immediately every eye went to Ike, who began mopping the bar excitedly. Startled, Monte stared around for some explanation of Ike's strange actions. So did everybody else.

There in the door stood a big, lean fellow in jersey coat, corduroy trousers and heavy lace boots.

Scrappy!

YES, his gaunt face was leathery brown and more set, his sinewy neck thicker, his hands clumsy and heavy; but otherwise he was the same raw-boned Scrappy I used to know years before. His cool eye penetrated the remotest corner of Ike's place.

The suspense became awful. The jacks slouched into corners and Ike's industrious bar-mopping became positively painful.

"What's all this, Ike?" asked Scrappy finally, tramping in. "I stood up for you in the city council because you promised me you would obey the law."

"Aw, you've stood for worse than this," belched Monte angrily, from his chair. "This here's on me—don't butt in."

Scrappy whirled on Monte, his jaw squaring and his breath quickening as he swept him up and down with a look. Then he shot out a finger at Monte.

"You shut up, Red Nose!" he shouted. "I was at the window and heard you beef. So you're going to show me up—going to steal my good name?"

"Your good name!" sniffed Monte.

"Yes, this—this new name I've earned."

"You got a new name, that's a cinch," Monte retorted. "You didn't call yourself Mr. Bickett when I used to know you."

"You dirty scoundrel!" Scrappy straightened, chin up, fists clenched, his black eyes blazing fire. "I never told my boys who I used to be, because I figured that didn't matter much. I ain't proud of the old days. But if it's to be told nothing ought to be skipped—so I'll tell them myself."

You could hear the old clock on the back bar in Ike's place tick while Scrappy told his story. It was a yarn that made the jacks gasp. For Scrappy did not spare himself. He started with his boyhood, when he picked pockets in the big city; then safe-blower; then burglar; then two black years in Sing Sing; then capper with Monte's show—con-man, plug-ugly, drunkard. No, it wasn't a pretty record, but it was raw, unvarnished Life, from start to finish.

"When Monte discharged me, boys," concluded Scrappy, "I had a robbery all planned. It looked easy. Such jobs always look dead easy. But I happened to meet a young woman in a Bowery mission. God bless her! Somehow, she wormed my sordid story out of me. She took my hand and looked square into my eyes, and she told me I was meant for better things. Oh, I couldn't believe her, boys. ——, hadn't I had my taste of the world? Didn't I know what clay I was? But she fought with me, argued, begged—gave me my chance. That woman, boys, is my wife. I changed my name, the old badge of shame, and we came up here into the big woods to fight it out all over again. Boys, I've been through the mill. I know this Monte Burke. All he wants is to run a lot of crooked games, to rob you of the few dollars you've got, and, by ——, I won't let him do it!"

Monte broke the tense silence that followed with derisive laughter.

"My layout will open immediately after the parade, boys," he said.

"It will not," shouted Scrappy. "I warn you right now it won't be healthy for you to start your layout."

Then, turning suddenly upon Ike, he exclaimed, "Close up this shop, Ike!"

The jacks began to slink away, but loitered at the door to see the finish.

Ike disliked this new twist of affairs. He stalked out from behind the bar.

"You've been gettin' too pestiferous 'bout these regions, Mr. *Scrappy*," he growled.

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The barkeeper, a powerful brute, had blood in his eye. But Scrappy, busy with his job of cleaning out the place, did not seem to hear him.

"I've swallowed the last guff from you, you jail-bird," continued Ike.

"Beat his head off, Bright Eyes!" goaded Monte.

Like a flash Scrappy wheeled on Ike. Out shot his heavy fist at the barkeeper's jaw. Jumping quickly aside, he swung with his other fist as Ike staggered from the first blow, and the barkeeper went down in a heap.

"Get out!" cried Scrappy, rushing at the crowd, which fled before him.

Monte tried to gather a crowd of jacks about him in the middle of the street, but Scrappy came to the door—this time with Ike's gun.

"Clear away from here!" he commanded, a gleam in his eye that meant business.

MONTE left, in a crazy rage. When he reached the show-lot, he punched the canvas-gang around and, at breakfast, he didn't speak ten words. After that, I did not see him until just before the parade. Then his temper was gone. He entered the ticket-wagon, mopping his red face. All the back-breaking work of putting up the show was over, the lot was filling with people and he had had time to forget his discomfiture at Ike's.

"What do you think of that sign?" he puffed.

I looked out and saw a man tying a white banner to a float. In shocking black letters I read:

COME AND HEAR MONTE BURKE
TELL THE LIFE-STORY OF
DAN BICKETT
EX-GAMBLER, EX-BURGLAR, EX-CONVICT

"But Scrappy told them himself," I gasped.

"Those it'll hurt him with don't patronize Ike's," declared Monte.

As soon as the parade had started, I locked the ticket-wagon and went out to see what effect Monte's banners would have. While I was sauntering along through the crowd, some one called my name. Turning, I saw Scrappy behind me. He was carrying a red-faced youngster, who hid his blue eyes from me behind a chubby elbow.

"Baldy," asked Scrappy briskly, "Monte has been at his old tricks again, hasn't he? He's fixed our sheriff and constable, eh? I can't find them."

He caught my eye and held it fast.

"Well—yes," I admitted.

"Where's the constable?" he demanded.

"Gone fishing."

I smiled, in spite of myself.

"And Stubbins, the sheriff?"

"He's at Still Cut."

"Just as I thought," he nodded decisively.

Without another word, Scrappy left me and I pushed my way back to the show-lot. We were pitched on a piece of ground alongside the river, and there wasn't much room for all our concessions. An hour after the parade returned, I began selling tickets for the side-show. Directly opposite, Monte had staked out ground for his layout, and a gang of canvasmen were busy raising the striped canopies and putting up the gambling machines. In front of the gang, with sleeves rolled up and collar unbuttoned, but still wearing his plug hat, walked Monte, yelling at the men to hurry. The band blared, the spielers shouted and the crowd of lumber-jacks and their women and children chattered and giggled nervously. Everybody seemed to feel that something was about to happen. And the strain wasn't relieved any by three barkers with megaphones, bellowing every minute that "the life-story of Daniel Bickett, ex-gambler, ex-burglar, ex-convict, will be told at the afternoon show."

"Well, the layout opens in half an hour," said Monte, stopping before the stand where I was selling tickets. "We'll commence milking these yaps before the dinner-flag is hoisted."

Fifteen minutes later I noticed Monte crawl up into the empty band-wagon. Behind him was a musician, carrying a bugle. They both stood up on the seat and, at a signal from Monte, the bugler began blowing. The crowd at once flocked excitedly toward the band-wagon.

"Ladies and gentlemen," shouted Monte to the gaping crowd around him, "it gives me great pleasure—to announce—that the games of chance—in which you will—have every opportunity—to test your fortune—will open immediately—in the booth directly opposite the side-show and——"

Monte paused expectantly, as several

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cappers scattered through the crowd commenced cheering. Their effort to enthuse the people was not very successful. Most of the jacks stood grimly silent, waiting for Monte to go on. But Monte never got any further with his speech.

FOR, in that brief silence which intervened while Monte was studying the mob in front of him, a loud shout startled everybody. All eyes instantly turned to see where the noise came from. A cry of astonishment broke from the jacks as they caught sight of Scrappy, hardly a hundred feet away, mounted on the rail-fence that divided the show-lot from the road.

"This is your last warning!" yelled Scrappy.

"The games open immediately," roared Monte, pretending to ignore Scrappy.

Then he turned slowly around, his mouth jerking into a scowl as he gazed down at Scrappy.

"You better stick on the off-side of that fence, Mr. Dan Bickett alias Garlin!" he shouted defiantly. "This land belongs to me to-day, and I'll lay you cold if you dare to stick your foot on it."

Monte shook his fists and became red in the face. The jacks shifted their glances back and forth between Scrappy and Monte, and a murmur ran through the crowd as the show-owner yelled to the gamblers to start the wheels spinning.

"Monte Burke has come defying our laws," cried Scrappy, over the din. "He's bribed our sheriff and constable. He's tried to bulldoze me——"

"The games have started," shouted Monte, at the top of his voice. "The games——"

A scream from the women near the fence cut short his announcement. The next moment there was a pistol report, a streak of fire in the air, and Monte's high hat was shot off his head. While his back was turned, Scrappy had whipped out a big revolver and fired. The showman's red face blanched to a deathly white when he saw Scrappy leap from the fence, pointing his weapon at him. The people about the wagon scattered to right and left in front of the advance of Scrappy and half a dozen resolute-looking jacks, who were armed with axes and had been lying in the grass along the fence until called into action by their leader.

"Quick, boys," rang out Scrappy's command. "Chop down those gambling-machines! Smash 'em to pieces!"

Scrappy's men rushed toward the gambling-layout. They were joined by scores of other jacks, to whom the excitement of wrecking the layout at once appealed.

"Smash the machines!" was the cry taken up by the crowd. The cappers in charge of the layout fled from the booths. Soon the flimsy canopies were pulled to the ground and the axes were splintering the machines.

Monte, forgotten for the moment, crawled from the band-wagon. Shaking with rage, he tried to shove back some of the men who were running to join in the demolishing of the machines. In a moment he was surrounded by excited men.

"That's the crook himself," piped some one.

Monte kept pushing and shoving and was joined by several cappers. All at once, blows were struck. The jacks rushed in and smashed about wildly. Monte was knocked off his feet, but arose and blew his alarm whistle.

"Hey Reuben!" he cried, which is the circus-signal of distress to which all hands must respond.

WHILE Scrappy and a crowd were busy some distance away wrecking the gambling-layout, another large crowd hurried to this new scene of disturbance. Several burly jacks came running with a thick rail. Many hands reached out and grasped Monte and, biting and kicking, he was put astride the rail and raised over the crowd. Off they marched with him, heaving things at him. Somebody passed Monte up his plug hat, and they made him put it on. Then they fired stones at it, while the canvasmen who tried to rescue Monte were only punched about for their trouble.

"Robber!" cried the jacks.

"Dump him in the river!" shrilled a voice.

"Yes! Yes! Duck the crook!" chorused the crowd, quick to catch the suggestion.

A stone had cut Monte's forehead and sent a streak of blood down his cheek.

"Don't, ——, don't!" he begged in a piercing cry, lifting his elbows to protect his head from the stones that flew about him.

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It needed only this anguished cry from Monte to set the rough men wild. Yelling furiously, they marched quickly toward the river bank.

Running from the ticket-wagon, I reached the bank just as the jacks were trying to shake off Monte's desperate clutch. A few feet away rushed the swirling water, breaking into whirlpools around the rocks.

"Don't!" groaned Monte weakly.

No sooner did Monte splash into the water than he was sucked under. He was shot off about twenty feet and came up, floundering with his arms.

"Swim! Swim!" bawled the jacks raucously.

But Monte couldn't swim a stroke and he was whirled around and around, going down between two rocks. He bobbed up again, still farther from shore, and was hurled head first at a rock. But, somehow, he succeeded in ducking his head and seized the rock. We saw his hands clawing the stone, but soon his head arose slowly. He was hanging on, in spite of the water's rush.

Behind us there was a commotion and several jacks were knocked down as Scrappy, breathing hard from his run, rushed to the bank. In one glance he took in the situation.

"What have you done, boys?" he cried in horror, pointing across the water. "Why, he's drowning!"

Sure enough, Monte had lost his hold and was again swept along by the current. Suddenly the crowd gasped. Scrappy had flung himself into the water and was swimming out with short, choppy strokes.

It looked like a losing race. Monte went down, and Scrappy seemed to move so dreadfully slow. But soon Scrappy reached a current that lifted him along like a feather. Monte came up, seized another rock—and clung! Then, while Monte was hanging there, Scrappy ploughed doggedly through a stubborn whirlpool. Often he narrowly dodged the rocks, but finally he fought his way to Monte.

Sometimes we saw Monte's face and sometimes we didn't. It seemed ages before Scrappy had covered half the distance back. When at last he neared shore, some of the jacks waded out and relieved him of Monte. They laid Monte on the ground and started rolling the water out of him. Refusing aid, Scrappy came sloshing in alone, panting with exhaustion.

"Get back!" he called to the crowd that pressed around Monte.

SHORTLY Monte came to, but his whole body trembled when we raised him.

"I'm—I'm sorry the boys went too far," said Scrappy, bending over him. "Me and the boys I fitted out with axes were so busy smashing the layout that I didn't see what happened to you."

"——! I—was—dying!" shuddered Monte, his eyes glassy. He clutched at Scrappy's arm frantically. "I was slipping out of the world. You saved me, Scrappy; ——! After all I did—to you."

Monte's mouth quivered like a crying child's and he pulled Scrappy's big hand up against his cheek.

"Every mean thing I ever did went sliding through my mind," he mumbled.

"Buck up, Monte," Scrappy cheered him. "You'll be all right, soon as you get some dry clothes. There's lots of good in you yet, old boy."

"Good?" repeated Monte. "Yes, yes, I hope so. I—I made up my mind—out there—if I lived I would cut out the gambling-outfit. I'm through with it."

"Say, I'm glad to hear that," exclaimed Scrappy, grasping his hand.

After he had given the jacks orders to carry Monte up to the dressing-tent, Scrappy tapped me on the shoulder.

"Will you sign a couple of affidavits so I can force our sheriff and constable to sign a pair of resignations I'll have ready for them when they get home?" he asked.

"You bet I will," I smiled.

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In the Blizzard.

A Tale of the Northwest Mounted.

by Ralph Delamere Keefer and Stephen Chalmers.

WHEN Grainger first joined the Northwest Mounted Police, he was not more than twenty-one, but he was a fine specimen of the Anglo-Saxon: six-feet-one in height, fair-haired, square-jawed, broad-shouldered, and I remember at the time noticing his great hands, which were yet as white and well-cared for as a woman's.

That was the beginning of his first four years of service. Afterward he disappeared for three years, then came back to the force and was stationed at White Horse in the Yukon.

But at the time I speak of he was a recruit at Red Deer, where I was stationed also. Red Deer is a detachment of the Royal Northwest Mounted, and it lies on the outskirts of the Bloody Reserve, about seven miles from where the Belly River trails out on the prairie. In the old days, it formed a back exit from the reserve, through which bands of hostiles occasionally sallied forth on predatory raids, urged to such deplorable performances by a child-like ignorance of the forces of law.

Haviland was Sergeant, I remember, and Haviland had the old soldier's contempt for a recruit. Thus Forty-Mile Grainger—he had been working for the Forty-Mile Transportation Company, which was all we knew about him then—Grainger annoyed Sergeant Haviland for many reasons.

He was obedient and willing, but his submission was touched with a kind of insolence, as if he remembered having been a gentleman at some time or other and resented discourteous commands. Then, too, he was fond of books of a kind that were beyond Sergeant Haviland. Finally, Grainger's table manners were excellent. Therefore, the Sergeant, who inhaled tea with much noise and with one thumb holding the teaspoon against the inside of his cup, disliked Forty-Mile Grainger and exercised the power of a superior to make things unpleasant for the subordinate.

And the result was something never to be forgotten by those who knew what happened.

A short time after his arrival at Red Deer, Forty-Mile Grainger and two other constables were grooming their horses when Haviland came along on a tour of inspection. For some time he watched Grainger at work, with an evident desire to find some fault. Grainger—deliberately, I think—botched everything he did, baiting the Sergeant, in return for much bulldozing.

"What *are* you doing with that curry-comb?" Haviland demanded to know. "That horse'll kick the head off you if you scrape on its hocks like that! See, this is the way to do it. No! Take it in the other hand—*so!*"

"Thank you very much," said Grainger, with just a tinge of mockery. "You see, I didn't have advantages when I was young."

The Sergeant went away, gritting his teeth. Forty-Mile Grainger glanced at me and said quietly:

"Dear old Sergeant. You know he isn't at all hard-hearted. He merely holds the theory that a recruit can not, in the nature of things, have an immortal soul."

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IN the Fall of the year, the Indian agent sent to Red Deer requesting that, as the treaty-payments were to be made the following day, two constables be sent to guard his office during the ceremonies. Haviland despatched Constables Watson and Chapelle, the latter a French-Canadian. I myself had other duties, with the result that Haviland and Forty-Mile Grainger were left alone.

I heard afterward what happened. They finished their midday meal together and Grainger washed up the dishes. There was nothing more to do, so Grainger stretched himself on his cot and began to chuckle over the contents of a little book bound in limp red leather.

"See here, *Mister* Grainger," said the Sergeant, unpleasantly, "haven't you anything better to do than pound your ear and read slush?"

"'Tisn't slush, old chap," said Grainger in his best manner. "Never read Calverley, did you? 'Varsity professor he was. Filled in his less serious moments writing humorous verse in Latin."

"Get up out of that!" yelled Haviland, furiously.

"Take this, for instance—delicious!" said the man on the cot, proceeding to read aloud:

"Acris hyems jam venit: hyems genus omne perosa
Fœmineum, et senibus glacies——"

"Constable Grainger," Sergeant Haviland commanded in military tones, "saddle your horse and lead mine out for exercise."

"Certainly," said Forty-Mile Grainger, getting off the cot. "That was from 'Carmen Sæculare,' but there are others——"

"Silence!"

Grainger leisurely lounged toward the stable. Haviland watched from the door until Forty-Mile emerged with the horses.

"I'll break you!" the Sergeant muttered. "Come here!"

Grainger rode up, leading the other horse.

"Dismount!"

Grainger dismounted, with not the slightest expression on his face.

"Throw back that leggadiero," rasped the Sergeant. "Now, look at that saddle-blanket. Look at it! Wrinkles under the cinch where your leg will chafe it into the horse's side. Put it on again. Easy with the cinch-strap; it isn't a granny-knot you're tying. Now let's see if you can mount without a step-ladder."

Forty-Mile Grainger deliberately mounted on the wrong side. Sergeant Haviland groaned in impotent fury, then raved. Grainger dismounted and climbed on from the left side.

"Now give them one hour and half—by the watch."

"Haven't got a watch," said Grainger, gazing absently over the prairie.

"Take this one," said Haviland, unstrapping a timepiece from his wrist. "And be careful of it, or I'll flay you alive!"

Grainger took his eyes from the prairie and gazed at his superior for a few seconds. Then he turned and rode away.

TWO hours later he walked into the Sergeant's office and deposited on the desk the mangled remains of what had once been a very fine watch.

"What in the name of seventeen blind rats——" the Sergeant exploded. "Is *that* my watch?"

"Awfully sorry," said Grainger casually. "I was grooming the horses after coming in. Hung your watch on the partition and one of the beasts kicked it off. Too bad. Must have been a nice watch. Did you value it very much?"

"Value it? For two pins I'd thrash you, Grainger."

"Ah!" said Forty-Mile, with a note of satisfaction. "Now, look here, Sergeant, I'm glad you've come to it. I'm a constable and you're a sergeant, but we're man to man. If you'll just remove your stripes for a moment, we'll come to an understanding."

Haviland tore off his tunic and flung it in a corner.

"There's my stripes. Now come on, you Siwash!"

Grainger's reply was a blow straight from the shoulder. It landed full on the mouth that had grilled him so long. Haviland went to the wall with his lips streaming blood. But, with a roar of fury, he rallied and lashed out at Forty-Mile. His left reached Grainger's cheek-bone, gashing like the kick of a horse.

Grainger staggered slightly, then, retiring a pace and swinging on his toes, he launched out the full length of his body and every ounce of weight in it at the Sergeant's heart. It was a terrible blow, a

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blow that would have crushed an ordinary man's breast-bone, and Haviland went down like a ninepin.

He got up again, however. Before Grainger could recover his balance, the Sergeant rushed in, raining a terrific shower of short-arm blows on his opponent's face. Grainger, beaten back against the wall, made no movement to reopen the attack, but contented himself with warding off Haviland's assault with his left arm. His right hung limply at his side.

"Had enough?" panted Haviland.

"Not a bit," said Grainger, through shut teeth. "But I've broken my wrist. How are your ribs?"

"I don't fight cripples," said the Sergeant, stamping out and slamming the door after him.

Five minutes later he came back with lint and splints and proceeded to set the broken wrist.

"Many thanks," said Grainger, quietly, when the operation was done. "We'll finish when my hand gets right, if it's agreeable to you."

"Yes, by ——!" snarled Haviland. "And, in the meantime, take warning. This was man to man. If you breathe a word of it to anybody else, I'll clap you under arrest!"

"What do you take me for?" said Forty-Mile Grainger quietly, going back to his cot and resuming "Carmen Sæculare."

WATSON and Chapelle came back in the evening. To their inquiries, Grainger merely replied that he had "run up against something and hurt himself." I returned next morning and met the Sergeant, who was scanning the weather.

"Looks like a heap of snow coming," said he, nodding toward the north, where gray masses of cloud had been banking up since dawn. "I've got to get over to the Agency before it comes. There's no saying when the trail will be open again. You'll take charge, Hammond."

At ten o'clock that morning, Haviland left on horseback for the Indian Agency. At four in the afternoon the snow came.

It floated down at first in great slow blotches that brushed against the window-panes of the barracks like white moths. The daylight dwindled to a dull leaden twilight. A sudden gust of wind lashed the bare branches of the cottonwood trees down by the river and shrieked across the gable-ends into the wilderness beyond, carrying with it a blinding scud of whirling snow.

The gust died down as suddenly as it was born. Then followed a stillness, out of which came a far-off moan. It approached swiftly, rising in tone until, with a demoniac yell, the blizzard hurled itself upon the solid log house, which quivered in every joint.

The whisper of the driven snow against the walls increased to a loud continuous rattle, which drowned the shriek of the wind. Then all sounds blended into one steady, deep-mouthed roar, the voice of the fiend of the Great Northwest.

Grainger was in his cot, reading. Watson and the French-Canadian, Chapelle, were playing checkers. I crossed over to the window and peered out into the storm. It was like looking over a precipice on the edge of the world, seeing nothing but white mists. It was as if some one had drawn a whitewash brush across the outside of the pane, while through all the tiny crevices in the casement snow shot in little knife-edge drifts.

Then I heard Chapelle's voice.

"Heem blow some," said he to his partner. "I t'ink dat Sergeant Haveelan' have hees trouble if he come back *ce soir, n'est-ce pas?*"

"Let's hope he'll turn up soon," I said, not revealing mistrust.

The shack trembled and groaned as another squall pounced upon it. Presently, my restlessness communicated itself to Watson and Chapelle. They abandoned their game and paced nervously about the barracks.

Where was Haviland? Had he started back from the agency? God help him if he had, was the thought on the face of every one—except Forty-Mile Grainger.

I never came nearer hating him than I did then. He was still sprawling on his bunk, reading and smoking. The bandaged hand only suggested how little he cared whether the Sergeant might, or might not, be freezing to death in the white blizzard at that moment.

Hours passed. Still Haviland was absent. Still we peered out into the terrible night and restlessly paced the floor. Still Forty-Mile Grainger chuckled over his little red book.

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But suddenly he laid down the Latin verses and sat up on his cot.

"That's the second time," said he, coolly. "Haviland's coming."

We listened. In a lull of the howling blizzard I thought I heard the faint neigh of a horse.

"That's the sorrel, all right," said Watson, quickly. "Haviland's a lucky devil, and he probably knows it."

But the French-Canadian constable was standing in a listening attitude and with a puzzled expression on his face.

"Wait!" said he presently. "I go for see. Dat horse wait for some one, I t'ink."

HE drew on his cap and gauntlets and went out into the storm. Grainger yawned and returned to his book. The rest of us maintained an anxious silence till the French-Canadian came back. He was literally blown into the room by the pressure of wind. We forced the door shut behind him with a violent effort.

Swearing softly to himself, Chapelle removed his cap, flicked the snow out of his eyes and, with a shrug of his shoulders, sank into a seat near the stove.

"Well?" I asked.

"Eet was a horse," said Chapelle slowly. "Eet was de Sergeant's horse at de stable door, but not de Sergeant, *lui-même*. De horse he com' back wit' hees saddle and bridle on, an' leave de Sergeant—out dere—somewhere!"

The French-Canadian shrugged his shoulders again, and waved a hand in the direction of the tempest without.

"God!" said Watson, in the silence that followed.

"*Oui, oui,*" said the Frenchman, half musingly. "De Sergeant he have made the de *longue portage*. Eef not to-night, to-morrow. He have drop off hees horse. De bleezzard have take him. *Spotsaquil*"

I looked around in dumb horror. In my mind was a tragic vision of Haviland, battling alone and hopeless in that white smother outside the window, shouting in vain for the aid that did not—could not—come. Even in that moment he might have given up the struggle and be lying down to die.

The evening wore on and the dull light faded into darkness, but without any abatement of the fury outside. Inside the detachment we made no attempt to prepare the evening meal, and the only one of us who thought to light a lamp was Forty-Mile Grainger, who found it difficult to read.

An hour later I was thinking about the man—Grainger, I mean, and his brutal heartlessness, when some one tapped me on the shoulder. I turned from the window through which I had been peering, and there was Grainger, with his fur coat on. He was trying to tie his cap over his ears.

"I once knew a chap who could tie a clove hitch with one hand," said he, "but he never happened to teach me the trick."

"Good heavens, man!" I cried. "Where are you going?"

"Oh, I can't stand this any longer," said he, peevishly. "Somebody's got to bring him in."

"I didn't know he was such a friend of yours," sneered Watson, who had been watching the reader on the cot with growing anger.

"What's that got to do with it?" snapped Grainger.

"Well, you can't go," I said. "I'm in charge, Constable Grainger, and I order you to remain."

"Your orders be damned," said Grainger, smiling into my face, and somehow I did not resent it. In fact, while I was speaking to him, I was most inconsistently tying the strings of his cap.

Then he started for the door. But the Frenchman was there first, barring the exit with arms spread out like a cross.

"*Non!* Fool! Eet ees *le mort certainement!*"

Forty-Mile Grainger simply reached out that great white hand of his and flung Chapelle across the room, where he collapsed in a heap. Almost immediately there came a gust of wind and a great flurry of snow in the room. The lamp went out as Grainger disappeared into the blizzard.

"Here!" I yelled. "Help me shut the door."

Presently we lit the lamp. The French-Canadian was sitting on the floor rubbing his head.

"Let heem go," said he, wearily. "He ees a fool an'—how you say?—eet ees a fool for luck. A fool—*mais—Dieu le garde—un brave homme!*"

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ONLY Grainger and one other can tell exactly what happened out there in the howling white wilderness. But I have since got a pretty clear drift of it all.

Once out of the log house, the sudden force of wind struck Forty-Mile like a battering-ram, pinning him gasping and breathless against the side of the building, while the powdered sleet drove against his face in millions of needle-points, compelling him to pull his fur cap almost over his eyes to protect them even partially.

For a moment, dazed and beaten by the fury of the attack, he leaned against the wall. Then he groped along to the corner and struck out blindfold for the stable.

In the lee of it, he could breathe once more, and had no difficulty in finding the entrance. The warm, dark interior was a welcome change from the biting fury without, but he did not waste time.

He put the bridle on his horse and led it, barebacked, to the door. Scrambling up on it, he urged the animal out into the night. The horse threw up its head and snorted protest as they rounded the end of the stable-building and met the overpowering blast. But, fight as it would, Grainger still wrenched its head around to the outward trail.

A few steps forward and horse and rider were engulfed in blank, stinging vacancy, as if they had been cut off from all humanity to struggle in some wild space between the worlds, illumined by a ghostly white radiance. The detachment buildings were already swallowed up, as if they had been wiped out of existence.

Shading his eyes from the cutting sleet, Grainger could barely distinguish the top of his horse's head in front of him. All sense of direction was completely lost. He had taken a line from his stable-door to where lay, he thought, the opening of the buttes. There guidance would be ended, the rest was in the hands of Providence.

For an indefinite time, hours it seemed to be, he blindly urged the horse forward, his body hunched and his head bowed low against flinty particles of ice that seemed to draw blood at each onslaught.

Eyes watering from the cold and the ceaseless buffeting of the wind, and legs aching from the grip he must maintain to keep from being blown off the animal's bare back, he pushed doggedly on through the whirling maelstrom, calling aloud at intervals and striving to pierce the curtain of white through half-shut lids.

Suddenly his horse stopped and whinnied. Bending forward, Grainger could make out the faint outlines of something solid ahead. It was a house. But what house, when there was none nearer than the Indian Agency? Puzzled, he drew closer. It was the stable, to which he had traveled in a circle!

The horse pawed at the door, but, sick as he was with chagrin, Forty-Mile Grainger jerked back on the bridle.

"Sorry, old chap," said he. "We've taken up this job and we're going to see it through!"

Horse and rider turned and disappeared once more into the white smother of the prairie.

The snow was deeper than when Grainger had first started out. It lay in great drifts, that were presently swept bare, only to reform in other places. For fifty yards, the prairie would be dry and hard underfoot, then the horse would stumble up to the flanks in a drift that the wind would tear and fling up in the rider's face. At intervals, too, the veering blast sent sheets of horizontal hail into Grainger's eyes, compelling him to turn his back until the spasm was over.

Gradually, as he proceeded, the bare places became fewer, the descending pall outweighing all the force of the wind. Grainger mercifully slipped from the horse and, with panting chest and straining limbs, plowed forward, leading the animal by the bridle. Once he paused to slip off his coat and fling it over the shivering horse. Grainger himself was perspiring freely from exertion, despite the zero temperature.

Then forward once more, with bowed head, ever and anon uttering the monotonous, "Haviland—ahoy!"

Once his feet sank through a drift into the treacherous depth of a "muskeg." He clutched at his horse's mane. The animal reared, and in the act drew its master back to safety.

On! on!—Grainger could not tell where. It was like trying to find some one who had been lost a thousand years in some ice-locked polar region where no light ever came.

"Haviland—ahoy!" cried Grainger doggedly.

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"AHO-O-OY!" came an answer from what seemed a million miles away. It had that dead, echoless tone of the wide places in the snow. But the faint sound brought Forty-Mile Grainger's senses to instant alertness.

Again he hailed. Again came an answer, but this time with startling distinctness through a lull in the blizzard.

"Where—are—you?" yelled Grainger.

"Here!" came the voice, but ghostlike again.

"To the left!" muttered Forty-Mile, and added, at the top of his lungs, "Don't mo-o-ove! Stay—where—you—are!"

"I can't move," came the voice down the wind, accompanied by a bitter laugh.

Grainger groped forward. Presently he stumbled over a misty, gray figure, crouched in a hollow scooped out of the snow.

"Sergeant Haviland?" said Grainger shortly.

"Yes—Haviland. Who's that? Hammond?—Watson?"

"Constable Grainger," said Forty-Mile, briefly.

There was silence—a strange lull in the storm. The crouched figure in the snow seemed to straighten up, and an unnatural voice said,

"Grainger? My ——!"

"Hurt?" said Forty-Mile, stamping his feet for warmth.

"Sprained ankle. Horse threw me," said Haviland weakly. Then, "How's your wrist, old man?"

"Get on the horse," said Grainger abruptly.

The Sergeant tried to rise, but sank back with a groan.

"I can't make it," said he.

Again there was silence.

Presently Haviland said, "What brings *you* here, Grainger?"

"Put your arm around my neck," said Forty-Mile, ignoring his questions. "Better put on this coat first," he added, snatching the garment from the horse's back.

Then Grainger stretched out his big arms, inflated his chest and, in spite of the broken hand, heaved Haviland on the animal's back.

"Git home," said he to the horse, and the horse started.

TWO hours later Grainger was plodding wearily along through the gray night, one hand on the bridle of the horse, the other supporting Haviland. All sense of location, all idea of direction, had been lost.

"Good thing you left the saddle off," muttered the Sergeant. "Horse's body warms me—fine."

Grainger thought this strange. He himself was burning up, as it seemed, and the drowsiness of the Sergeant's voice seemed to be creeping along his own veins.

Suddenly Forty-Mile grasped the mane of the horse. His footsteps dragged.

"She'll go down the wind—that's right. She can't miss!" he muttered.

Haviland was hardly awake, but a long time afterward he started to consciousness when the horse stopped and the bobbing, indistinct figure at its head sank down upon the snow.

"Grainger!" he yelled. "Get up out of that!"

"Take this, for instance," muttered the prostrate man,

"Acris hyems jam venit—"

"Constable Grainger!" snapped Haviland, in his harshest military tone. "Attention!"

Forty-Mile heaved slowly up from the snow—or was it his cot? He thought it was the latter. Haviland was a dog. He felt so worn out. Haviland's conception of a recruit was that he should never be idle.

One—two—three—four. He would go just four steps more. No, make it eight, then. Well, eight more for luck! And so on he went, counting his clogged footsteps by eights and wondering why the bobbing of the horse's head made him dizzy.

Again there was a stop. Grainger paused automatically and stared stupidly around.

"Wha's marra?" he muttered drunkenly.

"Horse played out," said Haviland dreamily. "Le's pitch camp."

Grainger instantly came to his senses and straightened up.

"Camp, ——!" he suddenly roared.

He grabbed the bridle. Once more the trio proceeded. One—two—three—four—five—six—— That must be a million steps. The figures beat on Grainger's brain like blows on an anvil. His broken right hand had ceased to pain him, however. It was frozen beyond feeling.

Suddenly Haviland swayed forward and dropped a heavy hand upon Forty-Mile's shoulder.

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"Grai'ger!" he managed to articulate through numbed lips. "Lis'n, Grai'ger!"

"—seven—eight! One——" muttered Forty-Mile.

Through the steady roar of the blizzard there sounded a single dull throb like the stroke of a mallet.

"Wha's tha'?" mumbled the Sergeant, his cheeks twitching in the effort of speech.

Chunk! Ch-chunk!

Forty-Mile Grainger lifted his head and said in a dazed way:

"Some'dy shoot'n'—'volver."

Haviland, by an effort of will, stiffened his big bulk on the horse's back and uttered a mounted-police yell. The answer was a shaft of orange-hued flame that stabbed upward in the white night ahead. The half-dead horse uttered a glad whinny and started forward of its own accord.

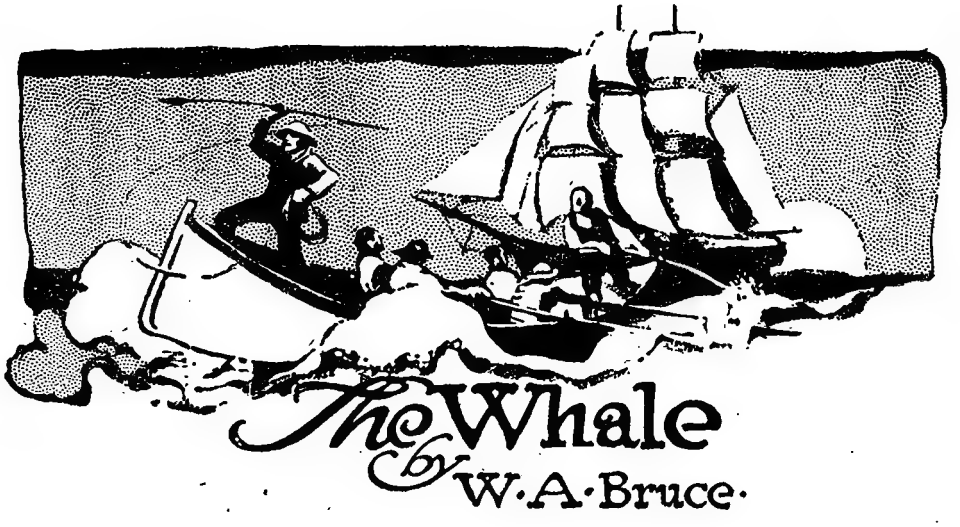
They had found the needle in the haystack. It was the detachment!

WE lifted the injured Sergeant off the horse and carried him inside. Without a word, Grainger had stumbled ahead of us and through the door, whence came the light of the warm stove.

"We never thought to see you again, sir," said Watson to Haviland, with the respect that one might pay to the dead or the resurrected.

But Haviland, with the strangest expression I ever saw on a human face, was staring at Forty-Mile Grainger's cot. A snow-sheathed figure was lying sprawled across it, and in the silence of the moment the figure was heard to chuckle, and mutter,

"'Varsity professor he was, but I'll drub him to a finish when my hand rights."



The Whale

by W. A. Bruce

"STERN all! stern all!" bawled the mate, and the oars bent like canes, as the men obeyed him and the whale-boat drew off swiftly from the side of the sea monster.

"Easy all! He's going into his flurry."

As the words were spoken, the wounded whale turned over on his side and began to move in a circular direction, slowly at first, but getting faster and faster, until at length he was rushing round at a tremendous speed. Throwing his gigantic head repeatedly out of the water, he clashed his great jaws continually, while blood poured from his spout-holes and his labored breath forcing its way through the clogged air-passages, made a noise like the bellowing of an enormous bull.

But the whale's strength failed at length. His mighty body subsided limply and he rolled to the long Pacific swell, lying on his side with the small waves breaking gently over him.

Immediately the mate's boat approached him from one side, while in from the other came that of the second mate, who had taken his share in the slaughter. In silence a hole was cut through the tough

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gristle of the flukes with the short boat-spade, a line was passed through this and made fast, and the crews settled down to enjoy their "smoke-oh."

"A hundred and fifty bar'ls, if he's one," said the second mate with calm satisfaction. "If the others are as lucky, won't the Old Man be pleased?"

"Seen anything of the others?" drawled the mate, idly.

"Yes, they're 'way back somewhere, nigher the ship. They seemed to be in the thick of the school and should get their spa'n apiece, I reckon."

But far astern the crew of the third mate's boat floated up to their necks in water, while the third mate himself, his face purple with suppressed rage, thought over what he should say to the fourth when he got on board ship again.

It was enough, as he said himself, to provoke a saint. He had harpooned a fat cow-whale, and was waiting his chance to sail in and lance her, when along came the fourth mate's boat attached to a skittish young bull-cachalot. The creature had headed straight for his boat, but had sounded when only a few yards off. Then, even while gasps of relief were breaking from the boat's crew, there had come a startling crash beneath them. The steersman, standing up in the stern, was shot forward on the heads of the rowers, and the whole framework of the boat collapsed like a broken-down umbrella.

Luckily, incidents like these are prepared for beforehand. The third cut the harpoon line and let his own whale go her way, while each man drew his oar across the boat and lashed it down firmly with rope-yarns carried for the purpose. They were up to their necks in the sea before they had finished, and could only wait until their ship, the *Susan Briggs*, whaler, of Nantucket, should bear down on them.

FOR two hours the crew sat and shivered, while the choppy waves broke against their faces and their bodies grew utterly numb. The third's feelings had settled into a cold, dangerous rage. He had in his mind thrown the blame of the accident on the shoulders of the fourth mate—Rob Dundas, the most popular man on board, who looked like a young Viking, and in time of danger behaved like one.

"The red-headed Scotchy! As sure as my name is Hiram Jefferson, I'll make him repent it!"

And Dundas and he had been inclined to be chummy! Ruddy Scot and dark, slab-sided "daown-easter," the two had taken to each other. But there was keen rivalry between them; both were hot-tempered, and not much would be required to make them bitter enemies.

The square-built *Susan Briggs* bore deliberately down on them at last, and the almost frozen men were hoisted on board—hoisted, for they were too frozen to climb.

The skipper, a good-hearted but peppery Yankee, intimated at length what he thought of this conduct in ruining a good boat. Although it is not conducive to good discipline to rate an officer in public, Captain Spalding expended his vocabulary upon mate and men alternately, until Hi Jefferson, snorting under what he considered the injustice of being wigged for what was due to the fourth mate's carelessness, was in a condition to fight with his own shadow.

There was no time at present to tender biting advice to Rob Dundas, as the cutting-stage was being rigged against the ship's side, a few feet above the water. The officers took up their position on the platform and set to work on Dundas's whale, the smaller of the two taken.

Dundas and Jefferson, being the youngest and most active, received the hardest job, that of cutting off the head. The other officers, using boarding-knives and aided by a windlass and tackles, ripped off the blubber from the body in great strips or "blankets."

When the tail was reached, the first mate cut through the backbone, and the huge mass of reeking flesh drifted away, to the no small delight of the birds, sharks and other deep-sea scavengers which gathered noisily, in contrast to the bitter silence of the two officers.

Meanwhile, Dundas and Jefferson, using their twelve-foot cutting-spades vigorously, slit the head open lengthwise, disclosing the "case," an oblong tank filled with clear liquid spermaceti, the most valuable product of the cachalot. This was carefully baled out with buckets, a triangular piece containing spermaceti was cut from the snout and the rest of the head was let drop into the water, where it sank like a stone.

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Work immediately commenced on the second whale, but a halt was soon called for a meal. Jefferson and Dundas had worked in dead silence, watching each other furtively out of the corners of their eyes, like two dogs ready for battle. At the summons, Jefferson threw his spade on the stage, while Rob left his stuck in the whale's neck, and the two climbed up on deck and disappeared into the cabin.

HI JEFFERSON was out again almost immediately. An idea had struck him and he had come to put it into practise.

"The young cul 'll feel it more if it's the skipper who gives him a dressing-down. He's got me into hot water, so I'll do the same by him. I'll just shift his spade a foot along, and—ah! that's right.

And Hi, taking Rob's spade, drove it deep into the case and retreated, satisfied.

"Birds seem kinder excited," remarked the skipper, presently, as he returned to his position on the poop.

He cast a careless glance overboard, and remained rigid, his jaws tightly locked together. Then, turning to the mates, who had just come up from the cabin, he demanded:

"Which o' you left his spade in that whale's head?"

"I did, sir," said Rob, wondering why the question was asked.

"Oh, you did, did ye? Waal, this *is* a ship! Just look at your work, will ye!"

Rob looked, and drew in his breath sharply at what he saw. A long line of pieces of white wax-like substance was floating astern. The liquid spermaceti was oozing rapidly from the gash made by his spade and turning solid as it entered the water.

The skipper's dark face had turned a dark red and his expression was frightful. His breath seemed to have failed him for the nonce, but when he commenced to speak he made up for it. A perfect hurricane of words played round Rob's ears, and Hi was not forgotten either.

"Blest if ever I saw such a pair o' things calling themselves mates. One o' them takes a boat out and brings it back like a Chinese patchwork-puzzle. An' t'other yahoo manages to ketch a four-foot fish 'n wastes what would buy three o' them. Twenty-five good bar'ls gone!"

Long after the two culprits had fallen to cutting again for dear life, the skipper's scarifying remarks kept playing about their ears until, long before his wrath had blown itself out, the two were looking "sicker'n sick hens," as the bo'sun put it.

Rob worked savagely, wondering vaguely how he had come to make such a slip, as he had evidently done. The more he considered the matter, the more mysterious it appeared.

He had left the spade sticking in the neck where he had been cutting. He was certain now of that. And in that case—

The hot Scotch blood surged suddenly into his head. He remembered that Hi had left the cabin for a short time! And Hi's face seemed even now to be wearing a satisfied expression.

What happened then neither could ever say, but in a few seconds the two, with white set faces and blazing eyes, were facing each other across the huge square head, each with his twelve-foot, razor-sharp cutting-spade at the ready. Each waited, half crouching, for the other to move.

"What're ye monkeying 'bout?" came a roar from the poop. "Look alive there, will ye?"

The tension snapped and the two, feeling as if in a dream, turned to their work again. When full consciousness of their actions returned to them, both were filled with amazed horror.

Cold sweat started to their brows as they realized where their ungovernable tempers had led them. But each had mentally chalked up a score against his former comrade, and how it would end neither knew.

II

"AH BLO-O-OW!"

The sonorous hail rang out from the crow's-nest. At the word the ship seemed to start to life. The men poured out from the forecastle, gulping down the remains of their meal. Captain Spalding seemed to spring from cabin to poop at a single bound.

"Foremast-head there, what d' you say?"

"Ah blo-ow! There she white-waters! Small pod o' cows, six, heading east by no'th, right in the way o' the sun."

"Right! 'Way down from aloft!" The

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skipper swarmed up the rigging to take the lookout's place.

"Mr. Jefferson," came from the crow's-nest.

"Yes sir."

"I don't want the spare boat used. You'll go with Dundas, and see 't ye take back the boat safe 'tween ye. Lower away boats."

The three craft took the water simultaneously. To shove off and hoist sail was the work of a moment, and the boats bowled merrily away, with a spanking breeze behind them.

Hi had shoved Rob's harpoon out of the way and stepped into his place in the bow. Rob's eyes gleamed angrily, but he said nothing. Half-an-hour passed. Then suddenly Hi raised his hand and pointed away to starboard.

"Blo-ow!" he breathed.

Rob sprang to his feet and followed the pointing finger. Not a mile away, a little bushy cloud of steam was apparently rising from the sea.

"Big lone fish," said Hi softly.

With a sweep of the eighteen-foot steering-oar, Rob swung the boat's head round. Hi stood up in the bow with his hand on the first iron, waiting.

The whale remained unconsciously on the surface, flapping the water gently with his great flukes. Rob edged the boat up slightly to windward of him. Hi poised his harpoon and let fly. It sank to the hitches in the blubber, like a knife in butter.

Quick as thought, Hi snatched up a second iron, and as the whale rolled over he let him have it.

"Stern all!" he roared, and the boat flew astern at racing speed. "The tail! Watch the tail!"

Up swung the monster's flukes. With a tremendous wrench of his steering-oar, Rob swung the boat round as on a pivot, and down came the terrible tail, not three feet away, raising a cloud of spray, drenching every one and half-filling the boat with water.

Next moment the boat was flying astern, while the whale was creating a fearful commotion, rolling over and over and lashing the water with his mighty flukes.

The mast was unshipped and the water hurriedly baled out. The whale had become comparatively calm, and Hi picked up the lance, an instrument consisting of four feet of wooden shaft and the same length of malleable iron, with a heart-shaped point of fine steel about two inches broad having an edge like a surgeon's lancet.

"Pull in," said Hi softly.

The boat crawled up noiselessly past the flukes and rubbed up against the side of the great bull. Hi stabbed hard and the boat flew outward again.

"Going to fight! Look out for the rush!" hissed Hi through clenched teeth, as the monster turned and came in a whirl of spray straight for the boat. A sweep of the great steering-oar and the boat spun out and around in a semi-circle, and the huge mass of blubber went foaming past. In blind fury, again the whale came at them, and again was he deftly avoided.

"Now!" roared Hi. At the word, in dipped the oars and the boat flew for the whale.

RIGHT in the act of turning, they caught him. The boat shot past his great head and struck his neck, or the spot where neck should be, and Hi, leaning forward, got in a deadly thrust. He felt the lance-point scrape on the broad plate of the shoulder blade, and glancing off that, sink deep into the animal's vitals.

Then in the full flush of triumph he saw the flukes curve into the air like a giant bow. Instinctively he sprang back, and Rob threw every ounce of his strength on to the steering-oar.

Too late! Back swung the mighty mass of gristle, shattering the bow and sending the wreckage flying out over the water, as if discharged from a catapult.

Hi and Rob exchanged looks of dismay. A sickening sense of helplessness came over them for a moment. Then nature reasserted herself.

"Trim ship!" came Rob's command. "Throw everything ye can aft here. Two o' ye ship oars and come and sit in the stern here. That's better now."

But he knew that the boat would not keep afloat much longer, even if the cachalot did not return to the attack.

Hi picked up the shoulder bomb-gun which every whale-boat carries, and was carefully loading it.

Rob nodded thoughtfully.

"The last hope," he muttered. His skill with the steering-oar was useless now,

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for to make the boat swing about with a shattered bow meant sending it to the bottom. Therefore, if the whale charged again, they must await his rush. Rob looked despairingly at the cachalot, beating the water in agony, not thirty fathoms off.

"Pull, you other two!" he said sharply. "That blamed fish is sounding and that means mischief. Row steady, will ye? Ah-h-h!"

The cachalot's head broke the surface at the spot they had left!

Not finding the boat there, he spouted, and Hi noted with satisfaction that the vapor was crimson with blood. He held the bomb ready. Then the stricken monster, head out of water and jaw wide open, whirled down on the doomed boat.

Hi swung round an instant and faced Rob. That moment of supreme danger had done what nothing else could. It had swept away the last trace of ill-feeling between the two. Their eyes met for a moment in a mutual smile of forgiveness. Then Hi, with the calmness of despair, discharged his weapon down the great livid cavern of a throat fronting him.

HI'S SENSES were lost in a rush and roar of waters. He felt himself beaten, and spun around like a piece of wood in a whirlpool. At last he opened his eyes and found himself lying still, gazing at the sky.

He stretched out his hand and touched blubber and jumped up as if stung. Rob's grinning face met his eyes. He looked around, tried to speak and could not, for amazement had robbed him of his breath.

The boat's crew—he counted them mechanically—were seated on the body of the great bull-cachalot, holding on by the harpoons imbedded in its side.

"How on earth did we get here?" gasped Hi.

The tub-oarsman, an old "shell-back," who was calmly trying to light a pipe, gave the explanation:

"Waal, I disremember edzackly what happened at first, 'cept that ole squar'head must hev gone right over us. Wonder he didn't swallow some of us. When I come to the top, I lay holt of the line tied to one o' these yere irons, 'n then I look up 'n see Mister Spa'n topplin' over on his side. That shot 'o yourn mus' hev bruk his backbone, or mebbe 't f'und his heart. Waal, I hauled myself up on to him, 'n bineby the rest histed themselves alongside. But ther was no sign o' Mr. Dundas 'n you, 'n we suspicioned you was both goners; but soon he breaks water, holding on to you, 'n we hists y' up."

Hi sat down beside Rob.

"Say, Rob," he said awkwardly, "you took me out. I won't forget it."

"Oh, stow it! Why, your shot saved the lot o' us, if it comes to that."

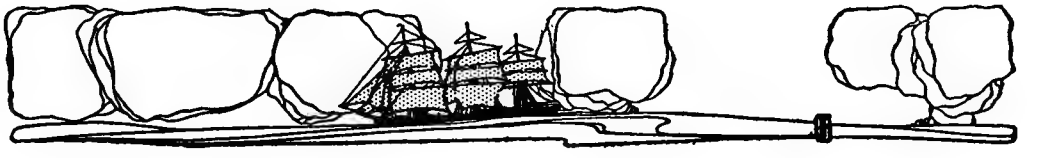
"But 'twas I stuck your spade——"

"That's enough. I reckon we both behaved like kids, but we'll forget about all that."

No more was said. But the two men gripped hands tightly for a moment and tried to talk unconcernedly of other matters. Then the *Susan Briggs*, with two whales in tow, beat slowly up to them and they climbed painfully on board, to have their hands wrung by the delighted skipper, who, from his perch in the crow's-nest, had watched the struggle through his glass.

"Never suspicioned I'd a lot o' Jonahs aboard," he said jovially. "'N what about bringing that boat back safe? Why, you ain't even brought back a plank o' her. Off below, an' turn in. You've done enough for one day, I reckon!"

And two chums, chums for a whole lifetime to come, went placidly below.



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According to the Evidence.

by Hugh Pendexter.

THE contest over the will of Reuben N. Asher had been followed closely by the reading public for many days, until it had aroused more than state-wide interest. The general attention given the litigation resulted largely from the personnel of those concerned in the outcome.

The decedent died at the advanced age of eighty-seven, having drawn up his last will and testament about a year prior to his decease. He was a man of long and honorable life, ripe with wholesome activities and philanthropies, though he was now assailed as mentally incompetent.

Professor Roscoe Quell, a nephew and the contestant in the case, had won enviable recognition both at home and abroad by his scientific researches, and was the author of more than one authoritative textbook. He was a man in the prime of life and already had reaped substantial rewards from his scholarly endeavors.

But perhaps the most interesting character in the little drama was the proponent, Miss Alice Asher, a niece of the testator, who received the million-dollar estate under the terms of the will, the nephew being cut off for the reason that he possessed an ample fortune while his cousin was penniless. But if the niece was bankrupt in pocket unless she profited by the provisions of the will, she was most generously endowed with beauty and, so far as her personality during the contest could be gauged, with an extremely attractive and womanly nature. Up to the time of the testator's death the relations between uncle and nephew had been most friendly, the latter often being a visitor at the Asher mansion.

Last, but possibly not least, in focusing the attention of the press was the fact that Walter Riggsley, celebrated in surrogate's practise for successful assaults on wills where large estates were involved, appeared for Professor Quell, while the fair proponent was represented by that veteran of eccentric practise, Ezra Stackpole Butterworth, founder of the Bureau of Abnormal Litigation, whose advent in a case licensed the expectation that the ordinary routine of of the law would be ignored. The appearance of Mr. Butterworth in any suit was sufficient to set the press-table to buzzing.

At the opening of the contest the Surrogate experienced a sensation of uneasiness, for he had been annoyed several times by the old lawyer, whose unexpected methods and shrewdness had more than once resulted in a reversal of the court's ruling by a higher tribunal. But as the hearing progressed and Mr. Butterworth, now the

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champion of normality, was compelled to confine his efforts to normal lines of proof, the court relaxed in his forebodings and at the end of the second week was wearing his official black robe with great complacency.

IMMEDIATELY after the formal proof of the will was offered, Mr. Riggsley began his battering attacks upon the competency of the testator, calling witness after witness to testify to the decedent's peculiar actions, and, withal, conducting himself so confidently that more than once Mr. Butterworth had warned his tall, angular assistant.

"Jethuel, our friend has something up his sleeve. Watch for it."

As the testator's roomy country mansion was somewhat isolated, the gist of the contestant's proof was based on the evidence furnished by the domestics and a few of the more immediate neighbors. For two weeks men and women took the stand and swore to the old man's unusual deportment, baldly declaring that his behavior in each sample of his alleged eccentricity had impressed the witness as being irrational. With forceful insistence and great skill Mr. Riggsley had piled up his accumulative proof until, from sheer weariness, the Surrogate burst forth,

"I do not think it is necessary to call more witnesses of this class at present, Mr. Riggsley. We are simply accumulating repetitions of what already has been received."

Mr. Riggsley smiled exultingly in the direction of his client and rejoined,

"I consider the evidence is quite conclusive as it stands, but as I have but one more witness of this class, I desire to heap up the measure."

"Very well; proceed," consented the court.

"Miss Tubbs, take the stand, please," said counsel.

Miss Tubbs, a short, heavy woman with a masculine face, slowly advanced to the witness chair and composed her features grimly. After saying that she had been the decedent's housekeeper for two years and had observed his behavior daily, she said she had not noticed anything peculiar about his actions until some three months prior to his making his will. To be exact, it was on Christmas Eve her suspicions were first aroused that his mental faculties were failing him.

"Explain the circumstance," gently prompted Mr. Riggsley, while Professor Quell fingered his short iron-gray beard eagerly and never shifted his gaze from the witness's face.

"He appeared to be very much excited and told me to ring for the stableman," said the witness.

"Were you present when the man answered the summons?" asked Mr. Riggsley, staring benignly at the ceiling.

The witness replied in the affirmative and repeated,

"Mr. Asher seemed much excited——"

"I allowed the witness's first speculation as to the condition of the testator's mind to pass without entering an objection," drily broke in Mr. Butterworth. "And while I know her characterizations will have no weight with your honor, I suggest that she confine herself to what she saw and heard, and leave it for the court to supply the constructions."

Being instructed accordingly, the witness sullenly resumed, "Mr. Asher told the stableman to hitch three horses tandem into the jaunting-car and drive over to the junction, some three miles, and get his nephew and a friend the Professor was bringing down for the week-end."

Mr. Riggsley drew a deep breath of satisfaction and softly inquired,

"What was the weather at that time, Miss Tubbs?"

"It was snowing hard that day, with two feet of snow on the ground."

"What did the stableman say or do?"

"Do you intend calling the stableman?" asked Mr. Butterworth.

"He is out of the State and can not be located," explained counsel. "Go on, Miss Tubbs."

"The stableman swore that master was crazy, and wound up by driving to the junction in a sleigh."

"Whom did he bring back?"

"No one. He was mad clear through when he returned. He said no one was at the junction, and that master must have dreamed it all."

"Please ask her if Professor Quell did not arrive the next morning," obtruded Mr. Butterworth.

"Don't worry; you shall have it all," chuckled Mr. Riggsley.

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THE witness next said that the contestant did arrive Christmas morning in a hired rig, and that her employer was delighted to see him and that the two passed a happy day together, the nephew departing on the next day.

"What was the next incident about Mr. Asher that struck you as being peculiar," urged Mr. Riggsley.

Darting a triumphant look at the old lawyer, whom she now considered her personal enemy, the witness related,

"Shortly after Professor Quell had left, I heard a booming sound in Mr. Asher's room. I knocked on the door and asked what was the matter. He told me to enter. I found him fully dressed and seated by the table, holding on his knee a drum."

"A bum?" exclaimed the court, suddenly popping into an upright posture.

"A drum, if it please your honor," corrected Mr. Riggsley, bowing deeply.

The court frowned heavily as if the disclosure did not please him a bit, and motioned for the witness to proceed.

Much elated with the effect of her statement the housekeeper eagerly added,

"Before I could say anything, he gave the drum several loud taps and explained that was the signal I was to always answer. Then he called in other servants and instructed each as to what signals he or she was to heed."

"Did he use the drum, as you've described, up to and after the time the will was drawn up?"

"He did," replied the witness, whereat Mr. Riggsley announced he had no further questions.

Mr. Butterworth, after whispering briefly with his assistant, took up the cross-examination, first asking,

"For all you know to the contrary, witness, Professor Quell was at the junction the night your master sent a rig for him?"

"The man didn't bring him back and said he wasn't there," stiffly answered the witness.

"But for all you know he might have been there that night?" persisted Mr. Butterworth.

"I would like to ask counsel what he means by this line of inquiry?" warmly demanded Mr. Riggsley. "His questions smack of the unwholesome and constitute a veiled attack on the integrity of my client."

"I make no veiled attacks, sir!" hotly rejoined Mr. Butterworth. "But I openly aver that on the afternoon before Christmas Day Reuben Asher received a telephone communication from the junction, the speaker purporting to be his nephew and asking that the tandem rig, wheels and all, be sent, as a good joke on a friend who was visiting in this country for the first time."

Pounding the table vehemently, Mr. Riggsley declared,

"This is an insult, your honor! I demand that counsel produce his witnesses to substantiate his statement, or else withdraw it."

"Do you expect to offer proof in this connection?" severely inquired the court, upon whom the contestant's grisly beard had made a favorable impression.

Mr. Butterworth sighed and said,

"The telephone operator who was on duty at the junction that day has disappeared, and I have been unable to locate him. He has vanished like the stableman."

As he said the last he turned and smiled grimly into the red face of his adversary.

"Your honor, this—this is an infamous innuendo!" choked counsel. "He is intimating that *I* have spirited a witness away. I demand that he retract his words."

"Surely I am not in fault for stating a simple fact," softly said Mr. Butterworth. "The operator *has* disappeared; so has the stableman!"

"Gentlemen, we'll pass on to the facts connected with this case," uneasily warned the court.

Mr. Butterworth turned to the witness and gravely asked,

"Isn't it a fact that on the day he sent the stableman to the junction he had a telephone conversation with some one? On your oath, yes or no."

Before Mr. Riggsley could frame any objection, the witness wilted perceptibly and replied in the affirmative.

"And isn't it a fact," thundered the old lawyer, shaking an admonitory finger at the perturbed witness, "that you overheard his end of the conversation?"

"I didn't!" loudly denied the witness.

"And didn't he say he would send the car and three horses because he agreed it would be a good joke on the newcomer, leading him to believe that wheels were used the year round in the Asher neighborhood?"

"No, he didn't!" warmly replied the witness.

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"But how do you know he didn't if you didn't hear any of the conversation?" asked the old lawyer, dropping his voice to a gentle key.

"Well, because—because I don't believe he did," faltered the witness.

"That's better, although it's immaterial," smiled Mr. Butterworth. "Now for the drum. Don't you know that Mr. Asher was passionately fond of music, that he played the snare-drum in his younger days, and even in after years that he spent much time rehearsing with the village band?"

"I knew he was fond of music," admitted the witness after some hesitation.

"And don't you know that Professor Quell, his nephew, brought him the drum as a Christmas present and suggested to him that he use it in summoning the servants instead of ringing the bell?"

"Your honor," broke in Mr. Riggsley in his most dramatic voice, "I resent this cowardly attack upon my client. Counsel practically charges him with plotting to gain possession of this property, whereas he appears here only to establish his rights against this young woman, who, tempted by the bait of gold——"

"We mask none of our charges, your honor!" exploded Mr. Butterworth. "We openly assert that Reuben N. Asher was surrounded by oddities and eccentricities by that person who hoped to profit by his seemingly irrational conduct and gain control of this estate! We insist that the testator never displayed the least trace of irrationality except after some visit from his loving nephew, and that his intellect was as clear as mine when he did those things which the servants and outsiders, not knowing what had prompted him, construed as symptoms of a failing mind."

"This is strong language, gentlemen," sternly cried the court, pounding his gavel loudly. "I insist that you abandon this unworthy exhibition of temper and proceed with the hearing."

AS THE old lawyer took his seat, Mr. Riggsley, now angry in earnest, expressed a desire to put a few more questions to the witness.

"Tell us about the bracelet, Miss Tubbs," he first directed.

"Mr. Asher insisted on wearing a bracelet of horse-chestnuts about his left wrist," hurriedly enlightened Miss Tubbs.

"What else do you recall?"

The witness pondered for a moment and then replied,

"He drummed for me one night and when I entered his room he was sitting up in bed, holding his jaws together with both hands. He told me to press up on his under jaw very hard, and as I did so he opened his mouth. Then he told me to close the jaw, and as I did so he struggled to keep it open.

"I believe that is all," informed Mr. Riggsley, turning and facing his client proudly.

"Oh, there must be something more," ironically persisted Mr. Butterworth.

"Yes, there is," snapped the witness. "One day I found him in tears, holding a piece of paper in his hand. He said he had just got word from a hospital that his niece was there, seriously injured. I took the paper from his hand, and it was blank! There wasn't a word on it. I showed it to him and he was greatly upset, but insisted he had just read it."

"Would you like to prompt the witness further?" jeered Mr. Riggsley.

"No," slowly replied Mr. Butterworth, "but I am very glad to receive the last bit of information. However, I suppose it would be useless to ask the witness if she believes that an expert chemist could prepare a paper, or an ink, so that a written communication would be but transient in its legibility if exposed to the light. It would also be idle for me to inquire if she knows that the movements and exercises of the jaws she has described are one of the commonest cures for affections of the throat, and are now daily used by all osteopaths. Likewise, it would be futile for me to remind Miss Tubbs that many young people, as well as those advanced in years, carry horse-chestnuts on their persons as a cure, or a preventive for rheumatism. But I do call all these facts to the attention of the learned court, and, if desired, can produce any number of witnesses to substantiate each assertion."

"We rest our case, your honor," said Mr. Riggsley.

"I ask for an adjournment until to-morrow, when I will call our principal witness, Dr. Elisha W. Pinkey, who is now out of town and will not return till to-night," said Mr. Butterworth.

"Court will take a recess till to-morrow morning," announced the Surrogate.

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II

IT WAS generally believed by those who had followed the evidence that the calling of Dr. Pinkey was the pivotal point in the case. Miss Asher would win or lose as the result of his testimony. Dr. Pinkey was celebrated the length of the land as an alienist, and his testimony had been determinative in many a similar contest. It was obvious that Mr. Butterworth would be unable to substantiate his charges that there had been a plot to surround the decedent with every semblance of mental weakness, because of the disappearance of two or more witnesses.

And while the old lawyer had cleverly combated the various points scored by his opponent, he had offered no corroboration of his suspicions. But if the alienist took the stand and came out flat-footed in favor of the proponent, the contestant would be hard-put to maintain any advantage accruing to him through the recitals of the domestics. For Dr. Pinkey was one whose word could not be impeached and whose opinion could not be purchased.

Ordinarily Mr. Butterworth and his taciturn assistant would have relied implicitly upon this witness and would have considered all that had gone before as so much skirmishing, if it had not been for the deportment of Mr. Riggsley at the opening of court in the morning. The contestant's counsel moved to and fro inside the enclosure continuously, yet his whole bearing was one of exulting expectancy rather than of uneasiness. The founder of the Bureau read his mood in a glance, and nodded shortly when Jethuel whispered,

"Riggsley seems very confident, sir."

After a moment's meditation the old lawyer observed,

"He believes he's fooled us in some manner, and yet he knows the strength of our witness. I wonder what he's up to. I wonder!"

The Surrogate now entered the bench and after a brief conference with the clerk nodded to Mr. Butterworth to proceed.

"I am waiting for our witness to arrive, your honor. His office informed me he would be here promptly at ten."

"Here he comes now," hoarsely informed Jethuel in great relief.

Dr. Pinkey was a stout, choleric appearing person, whose incisive bearing bespoke a man who had his own way in the world. He knew he was the dread of lawyers appointed to cross-examine him. As a result of this realization, he entered the crowded court-room with a slight smile of cynicism on his strong face, and eagerly cast about to learn who was the opposing counsel.

With no delay Mr. Butterworth ushered his witness to the stand, where the Surrogate warmly greeted him. The court's wealth of cordiality should have caused Mr. Riggsley to squirm uneasily, but that gentleman simply smiled in a good-natured manner and turned a whimsical countenance to his opponent. Professor Quell, from his obscure corner, leaned forward with glistening eyes, as if waiting for something sensational to happen. The press-table rapidly resharpened pencils and motioned for their messenger-boys to stand ready for the first batch of copy.

Dr. Pinkey answered the preliminary questions in short, sharp barks, as if annoyed at queries concerning his name, age, occupation, and was quite haughty as he qualified as an expert. Then with the court beaming upon him, with the spectators staring at him in mingled awe and admiration, he told in jerky sentences how he called on Mr. Asher the day before the will was drawn up. As the servants had been given a holiday to spend in merry-making at certain maple-sugar camps on the estate, the witness arrived early in the morning and took the testator for a long drive, remaining out all day with the exception of the lunch-hour spent at the Country Club.

From his professional observations on that day he was able to pronounce the decedent absolutely qualified to draw up his will, or transact any business, being complete master of his faculties.

"Would it have been possible for him to have undergone a change in his mentality overnight, serious enough to have incapacitated him for drawing up his will?" asked Mr. Butterworth, trailing one eye to scan the cheerful Mr. Riggsley.

"No, sir," boomed the witness; "not unless he suffered from a shock. I will add that I remained overnight at his home, and found him perfectly rational in the morning. I saw him two days later, and he was entirely *compos mentis*."

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The press-table wrote frantically, and Mr. Butterworth said,

"I believe that is all I care to ask."

AS MR. RIGGSLEY rose, notebook in hand, the witness stiffened and smiled grimly. He was used to such encounters and hugely enjoyed them. He believed that counsel, following the usual mode of procedure, had been cramming up for the cross-examination under the tutelage of some other alienists. Lawyers had essayed to trip him at his own game before, and he hungered for the fray.

"Returning to the day when you brought Mr. Asher home from his delightful sleigh-ride," began Mr. Riggsley, "did you go to bed early, or did you remain up several hours after Mr. Asher had retired?"

The witness gave the slightest perceptible start, and after a moment's hesitation coldly answered,

"I remained in the smoking-room several hours after my host had retired."

"The windows of that room look out on a field, do they not?" next asked counsel.

"The witness has not qualified as an architectural expert," reminded Mr. Butterworth, studying his rival keenly.

"I do not see the relevancy, but the witness may answer if he knows," directed the puzzled court.

"They do," answered the witness, his defiant eyes becoming worried.

"And as you smoked you stood at the window and gazed out on the landscape, did you not?" persisted counsel.

"Dr. Pinkey was called here as an alienist," gravely rebuked Mr. Butterworth.

"What do you expect to show?" curiously asked the court.

"I expect to establish the fact that this witness is not competent to give expert testimony as to the mental condition of Reuben N. Asher!" boldly informed Mr. Riggsley.

Had the tower on the city hall walked across the square and invited the statue of justice over the front entrance of the court-house to go a-strolling, the court and others could not have been more astounded. Mr. Butterworth was the first to recover from the attack and, as there was but one course for him to pursue, he blandly said:

"I am keenly desirous to have my friend attempt to establish his fact. I shall be greatly interested in studying his mode of procedure."

But despite the assurance expressed in this mocking challenge, the old lawyer was rather disturbed. For some inexplicable reason Dr. Pinkey was shrinking from the ordeal.

"Then, with the court's permission, I will proceed to gratify my friend," observed counsel. In a low, even voice he next asked, "Doctor, I want you to tell me what you saw when you gazed from the window. Anything that impressed you as being unusual, extraordinary?"

The witness licked his dry lips for a few moments while the court-room strained in amazed attention, and in a husky voice finally replied,

"I thought I saw an ostrich lying on the snow."

The Surrogate slumped back in his chair and plucked vaguely at the hem of his gown. At last he managed to direct,

"Stenographer, read the answer."

" 'I thought I saw an ostrich lying on the snow,' " complied the stenographer.

"Lord bless me!" gasped the dazed court.

"An ostrich?" murmured Mr. Riggsley, as calmly as if it were the most natural object in the world to behold in a Winter landscape. "What else, pray?"

"I saw the figure of a man, with arms outstretched," mumbled the witness, wiping beads of sweat from his brow. "Near him was a large heart—that is, something of the shape of a heart, such as we see on valentines."

"Do I understand the witness to say he saw a valentine?" exclaimed the bewildered court.

After counsel and the stenographer had put his honor right, the former coaxed,

"And what else did you see?"

The witness shuddered and with great difficulty confessed,

"I next noticed the word 'Insane', printed in tall letters across the snow."

The gaze of the court became glassy as it rested on the witness. Only Mr. Riggsley and Mr. Butterworth seemed entirely composed. The former again prompted,

"And what did you do?"

"I was much upset," muttered the witness. "I procured a lantern from the stable and went out to investigate."

"Tell us all about it," urged Mr. Riggsley. "What did you find?"

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"Nothing," groaned the witness. "The snow was unbroken, except for a few tracks. There was nothing on the snow." Without waiting to be questioned he rapidly stated that he returned to the house and on entering the servants' door met Professor Quell, who had arrived at the mansion after Mr. Asher left the house on his sleigh-ride. Professor Quell asked what had taken him abroad at such an hour, and remarked on his show of agitation. "I asked the Professor to accompany me to the smoking-room, where I again saw the same objects on the snow. I called him to the window and requested him to tell me what he saw. He displayed much surprise and said he saw nothing but snow."

"Isn't it probable that the objects you believed you saw were the result of shadows?" hopefully inquired the court.

"There was no moon at that hour and there were no shadows," wearily replied the witness.

"That's all," said Mr. Riggsley. "I now ask that the entire testimony of this witness be eliminated from the record, as by his own evidence he is incompetent to give expert testimony in this case."

"Wait a bit," mildly requested Mr. Butterworth. "I wish to ask the witness if he has any explanation for this experience."

"I can only set it down to a phantasm, an optical illusion," sadly confessed the witness. "I never experienced it before or since."

"After being deceived by your visual sense, when your mind should have been tranquil and composed, do you mean to say you were not grossly deceived in your estimate of Mr. Asher's mental condition?" demanded Mr. Riggsley.

"I must have been the victim of some passing mental disorder," wildly cried the witness. "But I still insist that Mr. Asher was sane and competent to transact any business."

"I insist that the testimony be allowed to stand, as it is a matter of record that a man may be deceived by his senses in one instance without his whole mentality being tainted," earnestly argued Mr. Butterworth. "No two eye-witnesses can give a similar description of any street scene. Objectively we are constantly being tricked. Dr. Pinkey's eyes deceived him for the moment, but his mind was as acute as ever and he instantly detected the trick, evidencing a higher degree of perception than the average man possesses."

"Yet very few persons, at liberty, see ostriches and hearts and printed words on March snow-banks," interrupted Mr. Riggsley curtly.

"Mr. Butterworth, this is a very serious matter," sorrowfully observed the court. "Have you any witnesses to corroborate what this witness has told us concerning the mental condition of Mr. Asher?"

"I have not, your honor," sorrowfully admitted Mr. Butterworth. "This evidence came as a great surprise to me, as I have not talked with the witness for several weeks. I simply knew he was a friend of Mr. Asher and had observed him closely."

"Then I fear I must strike out the evidence as being untrustworthy," regretted the court. "Ahem. Had he believed he had seen the figure of a man skulking about the premises, or a—a sled—something attuned to the lonely—huh—environment—huh—and the season of the year. But—huh—an ostrich!"

"I ask the court to adjourn the hearing one week, postponing any decision till the return day," requested Mr. Butterworth. "It is possible that in the meanwhile counsel and I may reach some agreement, tending toward a composition of the entire matter, and making unnecessary the need of taking further evidence."

"I shall be pleased to have the court convenience Brother Butterworth to that extent," readily assented Mr. Riggsley, rubbing his hands joyfully as he read a complete surrender in the old lawyer's petition.

As the veteran was gathering up his papers, Jethuel whispered,

"Do you suppose they'll agree to a compromise, or will they demand their full half?"

"Hum!" grunted Mr. Butterworth, frowning heavily as he wrote on a desk pad. "On your way to the office stop at the reference library and get me Ganot's 'Eléments de Physique,' Atkinson's translation. Also, all of Professor Quell's works on chemistry which you can find."

III

THE ensuing week was a busy one for Mr. Butterworth, although so far as his anxious assistant could discover his activities consisted largely in

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trotting about on mysterious errands at unseasonable hours. Among other things he directed his servants to prepare a cozy dinner for a few of his friends, to be served at his country place. Jethuel could not recall another instance when the country place was thrown open in Winter.

Miss Asher had come to the office once to discuss the advisability of taking the witness-stand, but the old lawyer did not inform his assistant what he had decided on this point. In fact, he did not mention the will except as he observed on the afternoon preceding the return day,

"His eyes registered falsely, he insists, but he rejected their testimony. If he is rational enough to detect a flaw in his visual sense, how can he be put down as being incompetent to give expert testimony?"

"Do you remember the case of Hiram Tanker's third personality?" grimly reminded Jethuel. "Your stand in that litigation established a precedent that would now be cited against you. But why didn't he inform us of his uncanny experience?"

"He was ashamed," replied Mr. Butterworth. "He hoped he would not be questioned on that point. He had to tell the truth when questioned because he is an absolutely honest man, and because Roscoe Quell knew of his experience. Anyway, I'm glad there's no bad blood between Professor Quell and me. We're good friends now, thanks to the mediation of Riggsley."

This information was far from soothing to Jethuel's outraged mind, and he sullenly shifted the conversation by asking,

"Any orders about to-night's dinner?"

"No orders, except be there at six-thirty sharp. It will be very informal. The Surrogate, Mr. Riggsley and Professor Quell will be among the guests. It will be a good time to patch up all our differences."

Once alone, Jethuel growled,

"If the old chap thinks this little dinner will soften the demands of the opposition any he's awfully mistaken. I wonder if he knows how Riggsley has publicly boasted his client will not accept less than half of the estate."

Whatever may have been Mr. Butterworth's motive in giving the dinner, his guests acknowledged it as being an amiable one by presenting themselves prompt to the minute, wreathed in smiles. The Surrogate was happy, as the invitation evidenced the old lawyer bore him no ill-will, although informed that to-morrow's decision must go against him. Mr. Riggsley was in excellent spirits, as Mr. Butterworth had assured him he would seek no compromise, but would abide by the ruling of the court. Professor Quell was quite fascinated by his host's cordiality, and it almost appeared as if the dinner were given in honor of the learned litigant.

In a lull in the conversation, after the soup, Mr. Butterworth directed a servant to run up the window-shades, whimsically remarking,

"By a coincidence this room faces toward the north, as does the smoking-room in the Asher mansion. It happens that the atmospheric and climatic conditions to-night approximate those of that other night a year ago. I wonder if Dr. Pinkey were here if he would see more visions in the snow."

Professor Quell and his counsel laughed heartily at what appeared to be proof of Mr. Butterworth's resignation to the inevitable, while the Surrogate smiled feebly, undecided whether to maintain his official rôle, or compromise on a semi-serious demeanor. The other guests whispered their admiration of the old lawyer's graceful surrender.

AS THE conversation lapsed again, Mr. Butterworth abruptly addressed Professor Quell,

"By the way, Professor, would you be kind enough to inform me to how many causes the various phenomena of phosphorescence may be referred?"

Professor Quell, suspending his fork in mid-air, opened his eyes in surprise and then narrowed them and intently gazed at the speaker, and replied,

"Five."

"That's what I had in mind," murmured Mr. Butterworth. "You class them as what, if you'll good-naturedly condescend to teach me?"

"I class them as Ganot does," quietly returned the professor. "There is spontaneous phosphorescence, such as in certain vegetables and animals. Phosphorescence by elevation of temperature, as best observed in species of diamonds, and particularly in chlorophane, a variety of fluorspar, which, when heated to three or four hundred

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degrees, suddenly becomes luminous, emitting a greenish-blue light."

"Thank you, thank you," cried Mr. Butterworth, while the other guests politely counterfeited an interest. "You have refreshed my recollection greatly. The next in order is phosphorescence by mechanical effects, such as by friction, percussion and cleavage, as seen when two quartz crystals are rubbed together in the darkness, or when a lump of sugar is broken. My faith, it seems only yesterday I was deep in my books! Let's see, phosphorescence by electricity is the fourth cause, such as results from the friction of mercury against the glass in a barometric tube. By George, Surrogate, I'll wager you can't recall so much of your chemistry, eh?"

"No, no; hardly," laughed the Surrogate. "But come, you're a boaster. You haven't finished yet. The professor said five causes. Name the fifth, huh."

Mr. Butterworth fumbled his chin in perplexity, to the great enjoyment of his guests, and finally surrendered,

"I know it, but I can't recall it. The Professor will have to come to the rescue again."

Professor Quell stroked his short, stubby beard with thoughtful deliberation and was silent for some moments before he said,

"The fifth cause is phosphorescence by insolation, or exposure to the sun."

"An example, please," challenged the Surrogate playfully.

In a class-room voice the Professor continued,

"A large number of organic substances, after being exposed to the action of the solar light, or of the diffused light of the atmosphere, emit in darkness a phosphorescence, such as dry paper, silk, cane-sugar, milk-sugar, amber, and the teeth."

"Bravo!" applauded Mr. Butterworth. "Do you know I love chemistry and have always regretted I did not turn to it instead of the law. There's nothing prosaic in chemistry, no ruts, no routine, no beaten path of precedent. Every chemist is an explorer. But, Professor, I observe you've left out one of the most universal phosphorescent effects under the fifth cause."

"I did not assume to be exhaustive," hastily obtruded the Professor.

"But what one does our host refer to?" rallied Mr. Riggsley.

"I referred to *snow!*" slowly replied Mr. Butterworth, in a loud voice.

Professor Quell bent a mathematical stare upon the speaker and settled back in his chair. The intensity of his gaze would have been commented upon had not the white-haired butler at this juncture thrown the party into confusion by crying out,

"Oh, come to the windows at once, gentlemen, I beg of you! Look! look!"

With a muttered exclamation Mr. Butterworth pushed back his chair and the others quickly followed his example and rushed to the windows.

"What is it? Make room for the court! I'll hand down an opinion. Bless my soul!" exploded the Surrogate, backing from the window and blinking rapidly and then flattening his nose against the pane.

A VOLLEY of ejaculations and excited queries radiated from the clustered heads as the guests stared forth incredulously into the night. Then the butler turned off the lights so that the men might see the better. What astonished and filled the gazers with wonder was the figure of a gigantic ostrich just beneath the windows and apparently in pursuit of a huge human skeleton. Farther away, sharply outlined in black against the soft gray whiteness of the snow, was the startling interrogation, "Are we all insane?" And what caused new conjecture was the boldly printed direction, "Read Quell on 'Winter Phenomena.'"

"What kind of a joke is this?" exclaimed Mr. Riggsley, his heart sinking as he feared the dinner had been planned for a wide-reaching purpose.

"Bless me! An ostrich!" babbled the Surrogate, rubbing his eyes.

"Great Scott!" bawled a young assistant corporation counsel from the end window. "Come down here. Here's an elephant!"

"There's an alligator chasing a rabbit!" shouted a third.

"Can it be possible!" stuttered the Surrogate. "Upon my soul, I believe this is a trick!"

"You're more suspicious than poor Dr. Pinkey was," laughed Mr. Butterworth, switching on the lights. "He believed he was the victim. Why, where's Professor Quell?"

A hasty scrutiny of the room failed to discover that learned gentleman.

"Now that's too bad—he's taken fright and run away. As I got my hint from his

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book on 'Winter Phenomena' it's no more than right he should be here to take the credit."

"What does this mean, Mr. Butterworth?" hoarsely demanded Mr. Riggsley, who was utterly dumfounded by the disappearance of his client.

"Professor Quell's work informs us how the action of sunlight on the snow creates a phosphorescence," blandly replied Mr. Butterworth. "Snow is one of the substances that becomes phosphorescent in darkness after insolation, or exposure to the solar light. Professor Quell suggests that one take a blanket and spread it on the snow during a sunshiny day and then remove it at sundown. The square of snow thus shut off from the solar light will retain its shape accurately at night, having no phosphorescence, and will show up in sharp contrast with the surrounding phosphorescent areas. Should you approach the dark square it will not disappear. It would be the same as if you were gazing at a black shadow. You could make accurate measurements of it. But, of course, should you approach with a lighted lantern it would vanish and you'd find nothing but white snow."

"This foolery leads to what, sir?" harshly demanded Mr. Riggsley, pale with passion as he began to believe he had been thoroughly duped.

"It gives a rational explanation of Dr. Pinkey's irrational testimony," quietly answered Mr. Butterworth. "It explains how he saw things in the snow, yet found the surface unmarred when he investigated. In short, some one, desirous of impeaching his testimony in some instance like the Asher will-contest, took advantage of the servants' absence from the mansion, plus Mr. Asher's absence, and placed figures, probably made of cardboard or paper, on the snow beneath the smoking-room windows. The figures were removed before any one returned home. Then, sir, as evening advanced and the great snow areas responded with the ghostly light stored up in their cold bosoms during the day, the patches covered by the cardboard or paper had no phosphorescence to throw off, and as result the doctor saw things and even reached the point of condemning his own intellect."

"Is it possible!" ejaculated the Surrogate.

"Not only possible, but deplorable that Professor Quell should use his great talent in a miserable attempt to defraud a girl!" emphatically denounced the old lawyer. "What's more, I have located the telephone-operator and stableman. By them I can prove Quell telephoned from the junction in person, suggesting the tandem hitch and the jaunting-car; that he brought the drum to Mr. Asher, and advised the horse-chestnuts for rheumatism. It was Quell who wrote the letter informing the old man his niece was at death's door in the hospital. He used a dilute solution of chloride of cobalt, which was invisible when dry and in a normal temperature. He bribed the stableman, who carried the mail, to heat the letter in the oven so that it would be perfectly legible when presented to Mr. Asher. By the time the housekeeper reached the room it had faded out again."

"This is monstrous—" weakly began Mr. Riggsley.

"It is monstrous, and I am pleased to state that Mr. Riggsley believed his cause an honest one," announced Mr. Butterworth. "But let us take the lanterns and make the test Dr. Pinkey did. He must be thoroughly exonerated from his self-accusation and be put right with the public."

"THE court finds that the evidence of Dr. Pinkey is wholly reliable, and must stand. The clerk will furnish the gentleman of the press with a statement of some interest, given out in justice to Dr. Pinkey. Have you any further evidence to offer, Mr. Riggsley?"

"None, your honor," sadly replied Mr. Riggsley.

"Then the court rules that the objections are not substantiated by facts and are hereby overruled, and that the will of Reuben N. Asher is duly admitted to probate. Call the calendar, Mr. Clerk."

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The West Coast Queen

Señorita Maggie McCarty, the Spike & the Presidente

by Ledward Rawlinson

WHENEVER the prima donna was intoxicated or otherwise indisposed, the manager of the Voz de Oro Opera Company posted a notice on the door of the theater, stating that, owing to the illness of the illustrious Señorita Zoila Chimbota, there would be no performance. No money was returned, and tickets, opera or no opera, were good only on the date of issue. Yet so highly honored were the natives at having the distinguished singer in their midst that not a single dissenting voice was ever heard.

In private life, Señorita Chimbota was Maggie McCarty. Her father was a Valparaiso longshoreman of Irish importation, her mother a Chilean washerwoman. This, however, is inside information, and is only published now by special and gracious permission. Zoila was the uncrowned queen of the West Coast of South America.

She really was very good looking. Her white skin was flavored with just enough olive to be pleasing, her teeth white as pipe-clay, her eyes black as soot. Like all famous operatic stars, she was daintily built, and weighed somewhere in the neighborhood of two hundred pounds. Her age was over twenty-one, considerably over. She could sing in three languages and speak her mind, when necessary, in five. Her personality would have killed most women. She was both volatile and versatile. Whenever there was a slump in the grand-opera market, she walked tight-rope in a circus, gave boxing exhibitions, joined a church choir, or did anything else that came along.

But singing was unquestionably and undeniably her forte. If some New York impresario had only heard her intermezzo-soprano voice once, she would have thrilled the world. As it was, she buried her light under a bucket and sang for twenty dollars a week, instead of twenty dollars a minute.

Young men, old men, poor men and local captains of industry, all bowed down and worshiped her, but, womanlike, she spurned them all for her manager, a bleary-eyed, cadaverous U. S. citizen—habitat Wilkesbarre, Pa.—who journeyed through life burdened with the appellation of Jit Salt. Jit began to live in the real sense of the word at the age of twenty-five. At this stage of the game his father died and left him fifty thousand dollars, with which he immediately hied to Broadway to see the sights of that wide, blazing trail and revel in the ambrosial food of the all-night lobster palaces. Once again the old, old story of wine, women and waiters was repeated. They skinned him to the pennies and left him alone with his grief. Having no more fathers to fall back upon, the prodigal went nobly back to work, cheering himself by constantly reiterating that weak and watery adage which the policeman wrote, to wit, "Labor is Man's Best Friend."

OWING to a clerical error, Jit acquired a job as a private detective, but he was fired on the second day of his servitude, for taking two blood-hounds into the main dining-room of the Waldorf-Astoria when on the trail of Gus the Gore, the notorious baby-carriage thief of Harlem. Of course it was a mistake.

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He ought to have checked the bloodhounds in the coat-room, but, as the man said when he bounced on the sidewalk after jumping from the twenty-ninth floor because the elevators were too slow, we all make mistakes at times. Soon after this, Jit chanced upon a beautiful poster showing a group of prosperous-looking young men in white drill lolling upon a tropical shore. The sky was blue, the sea was green, the air was spicy and the palms were heavy with coconuts, monkeys and other tropical fruit. Underneath was this tract:

Young men wanted. An unusual opportunity for travel, education and advancement. Good Pay. No expenses. Apply ——

Whereat the wanderlust bit Jit and, before he realized it, he had a good job in Uncle Sam's Navy. But, somehow or other, he never had an opportunity to meet the men in the picture. Perhaps this was because they set him to work as a stoker, 'way down in the cellar of a battleship. In any case, it was a rotten job for a man of esthetic tastes, so, at the very first opportunity, Salt, A. B., deserted the salty sea.

One night, in the port of Valparaiso, he bought a set of false whiskers and escaped to the shambles of the water-front. There, fortune in the shape of Maggie McCarty smiled upon him. It was really due to Jit's influence that Maggie left the restaurant and went upon the stage. Her success was instantaneous; the whole West Coast groveled at her feet.

NOT so very long ago, it happened that Señorita Zoila and Señor Jit, together with the jetsam and flotsam of the Voz de Oro Opera Company, were performing in Ororo. Ororo is in Andesia. The few geography-books that mention this far-off republic state that it has an area of two hundred thousand square miles. This is a gross prevarication. Most of those miles stand on end and poke their snowy noses far into the clouds; they're not square at all; they're perpendicular.

Ororo perches on top of one of these perpendicularities—a cluster of baked-mud huts with moss-incrusted roofs of Spanish tile, a cathedral, seventy or eighty decrepit churches and a tottering old dobie jail. A word en route about that jail. Board is not supplied to prisoners unless it is paid for. If a man has no money, then he omits his meals. It is a perfectly simple arrangement, based upon the theory of the survival of the fattest, and prevents the place from growing too popular or becoming uncomfortably crowded. Sing Sing, Atlanta and San Quentin papers please copy.

The weather up on the plateau is vile. During the day a tropic sun shines through the thin mountain air and sends the mercury bubbling out of the top of the thermometer, while at night a cold, arctic wind from the snow-capped ranges completely reverses the procedure with its doleful *Miserere.* It is not a nice place to live in; the death-rate is very high. But there is gold and copper and tin in the mountains, and, on the altar of precious metals, men will ever offer up their lives.

On account of the prohibitive climate and stage-coach fare, the Voz de Oro Opera Company did not ordinarily risk its lungs on a visit to the high altitudes of Andesia when on its annual trip up the coast, but having gone broke in Arequipa, Peru—and the best organized business draws a blank once in a while—it succumbed to an invitation from the music-mad citizens of Ororo to have its fare paid over that wonderful upland road that leads to the roof of the western world. The natives of Ororo, because of the isolated position of their home, were hard-pressed for amusement. They had no brass bands, no bull-fights, no moving picture shows, no reliefs save the innocuous pursuit of guinea-pigs and viscachas.

Once in a while, black smallpox broke out and created a little excitement by carrying off half the population, and now and then a prominent citizen or a German died of pneumonia, but for the most part it was an endless succession of undistinguished days. Therefore, when the far-famed Zoila arrived, she received a mighty ovation on the outskirts of town and was handed a massive silver key to the city, which she immediately traded for six packets of cigarettes and a bottle of Italian Chianti.

The advent of the prima donna was propitious. The last few kilometers of railroad that were to connect Ororo with La Piña, the capital, were just being laid, and ere long the town became crowded with gringos. So freely did the railroaders buy

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champagne for the star, she was rarely able to make a public appearance more than three or four times per week, although billed for seven. Zoila received callers and held receptions in a lofty-ceilinged room in the Hotel Americano.

Tastefully arrayed in a pink silk gown trimmed with black velvet ribbons, and displaying an abundance of white lace and fascinating hose of cardinal red, she sat on the edge of a table surrounded by a small contingent of homesick engineers from God's country, social caballeros of mahogany tint and Indian extraction, army officers, barnacled with much gold lace, and silk-hatted diputados from La Piña. There, in a blue haze of cigarette-smoke, she flirted and coquetted, received proposals in alphabetical order, accepted presents, played monte, sold mining-stock, gold bricks and genuine Inca relics from the ruins of Tihuanaco in Bolivia.

Jit Salt was official bartender on all these chicanerious occasions, for, by purchasing imitation champagne from the proprietor of the hotel at ten pesos and selling it to the hot-blooded, semi-delirious worshipers at Zoila's red-slippered feet for twenty, he was able to render quite a satisfactory balance-sheet for his department. All of which goes to show that Salt had some of the elements of a financier in him if not of a sleuth or a sailor.

BUT, though Zoila reveled in this private adulation, not to mention the proceeds of the bunco, and frequently drank herself into a state of unladylike hilarity, she ever pined for the glow of the footlight-candles, the rapturous faces of the *gente fina* and the tense, petrified look of the Cholo Indians in their gaudy, homespun ponchos.

Words can not describe these gala performances—the packed house, the gramaphone orchestra, the soldiers with fixed bayonets at the end of each row of seats, to maintain order, and last, but loudest, the sad, insistent voice of the prompter in the wings.

When carried away by enthusiasm, it was the custom of those frenzied Andesian bondholders to throw flowers, money and jewelry upon the stage, all of which was thankfully received and duly acknowledged. On the other hand, when the play was not to their liking, the Cholos threw chairs, cut-glass pitchers, empty kerosene cans, dobie bricks and anything else within reach. In the latter event, Jit often came forth and valorously licked as many of the culprits as he could find.

On one memorable evening, when Zoila's voice was volplaning at an altitude of about twenty thousand feet, Arturo Lopez, a rich rubber-man from the Amazon valley, became very reckless and threw a five-peso bill at her feet. Naturally, the prima donna immediately put the brakes on her larynx, smiled very gently at the donor and stooped to pick up the money. Simultaneously the members of the chorus, who had not been fed for three days, made a concerted grab for the offering. In the mêlée that followed, Zoila lost her balance and fell with a spine-splintering shriek into the orchestra. This necessitated changing the program from "Carmen," to "A Girl's Crossroads," and putting several stitches into the heads of two prominent politicians, who forever afterward were the envy of the masculine section of the town. It should also be mentioned that, in addition to losing her balance, Zoila lost the five. Profiting by this experience, the chorus was securely handcuffed before going on the stage from that day forward.

At times, when not sufficiently incapacitated by the champagne of her countless admirers to necessitate a postponement of the show, Zoila sat through her act in a chair or dangled her legs from a table as in unsteady chords she lifted up her *voz de oro* in song. The only trouble on these occasions was that she would never leave the stage. Calmly smoking a cigarette, she sat in full view of the audience when, theoretically, she had been killed or badly mauled in a previous act. It was very embarrassing for the rest of the performers.

Still, they were great nights, those nights in Ororo, with all the ladies' jewels sparkling and every kerosene-lamp in the house alight. When you are told that admission was refused to gentlemen in their shirt-sleeves, that no guns, pistols, dogs or pet sheep were allowed in the theater, you will be able to form a faint idea of the splendor, of the magnitude, of these functions.

ON NATIONAL holidays, of which there were from nineteen to twenty-two per month, His Excellency Don Guillermo Catalino, President of the

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Republic, came by stage to Ororo for the express purpose of attending the opera. Whenever possible, he left his wife behind, for he, too, was smitten by the penetrating charms of the prima donna and made her many valuable presents in the way of rubber concessions, silver mines and other governmental odds and ends. He could not afford to give her diamonds, as he would have liked, for the simple reason that he was broke. In ten months he had not received a cent of salary, the treasury having been depleted by constant revolutions. All the crown-jewels were in hock and the time-worn dodge of running a lottery for a new hospital had been tried in vain. To make matters worse, the Americanos regularly confiscated all the customs-receipts, to obtain payment for the railroad. Of a truth, the wolf was barking at the door.

On gala nights, when Don Guillermo occupied the presidential box, all the wealth and beauty in the land blossomed forth in their fiesta clothes, powdered and puffed, scented and garlanded. This made the rules of the house stricter still. Unless a man had shoes on, he could not get in at all. You have no idea how those Andesian people stand on etiquette at times.

II

WHEN the Opera Company had been in that distant seat of culture for about a month, Mons. Michael Hennessy, of Paris, Texas, chief engineer of the Andesia Railway Construction Company, announced with pride that the last spike in the last redwood tie which would finish connecting Ororo with the outside world, would be driven by President Catalino on the *Cuatro de Julio*—Fourth of July—a matter of ten days. Great excitement ensued immediately. The natives foregathered in the market-place and in solemn council planned a week of riotous festivity.

Within five days, four bulls were secured at great cost from Cochacocha for a bull-fight, a Spanish toreador was engaged to come from La Piña and ten criminals were sentenced to be shot in the Plaza, women and children first. There is nothing like a nice, quiet execution, with appropriate musical selections, to help out a celebration. It gives a thrill that nothing else can. Millionaires and society-leaders please note.

Next, a prosperous mining-company donated a handsome gold spike studded with diamonds for the ceremony and another a hammer of silver to drive it temporarily into a slot in the tie, both on the understanding that the weapons were to become the property of the Republic of Andesia as souvenirs of the most wonderful event in the history of the land. Catalino fought desperately to change this arrangement, in order that the valuables might fall into his possession, but in vain. This was a bitter blow. That spike was worth five thousand dollars and had been specially made by the best jeweler in Lima.

Zoila waxed enthusiastic on hearing the news of the proposed ceremony, and volunteered, weather and circumstances permitting, to sing the national anthem at the psychological moment. Her gracious offer was quickly accepted by the Entertainment Committee.

The streets were decorated with Andesian and American flags, paper roses and Chinese lanterns, and a triumphal arch of wood and canvas, painted with cornucopias emitting gold coins, sheaves of corn and herds of llamas, was erected at the end of the railroad-track. Indians from all over the wide-stretching pampa came loping into town for the celebration.

There was only one thing talked of on the streets, that was the diamond-studded spike. Not a man ventured a remark on anything else. Guarded by half a troop of barefooted infantry, the spike lay on a red-velvet cushion in the parlor of the Intendente de Policia, an object of awe and admiration. Thousands came to gaze open-mouthed at the glittering symbol of Yankee brains and industry which would open up for Andesia an era of peace, prosperity and exorbitant freight-rates.

The Government newspaper devoted columns of both prose and poetry to it, also numerous bad illustrations, but the Opposition paper was not nearly so generous. In a few cold words, it stated that the best possible use for the spike would be to drive it into the wall of the cathedral about twelve feet from the ground and on it hang the rind-faced president who had sold his country to the thieving Americanos.

Thus, you will see, as in our own fair and beautiful country, the job of president of a South American republic is not what

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it is cracked up to be. Seek not to rule the destinies of a people, 'tis a thankless occupation and will land you before an investigating committee sooner or later. Till the seed, plant the soil, play the market, dodge the taxi-cabs, but put aside all presidential ambitions.

THE days went by as all days do if they are left alone. Gradually the somber rookeries called hotels became inundated with pompous army officers gripping their murderous-looking swords and clanking their silver spurs, foreign ministers in frock-coats and high hats, consuls, legation-secretaries, special correspondents, native senators and American engineers. By day they sat in the café, drinking cocktails and crying "*Viva Andesia*," and after dark they sat in their frigid, vault-like bedrooms warming their hands round candles and wishing they were in Hellmira. Nowhere in all the world is there so venomous a cold as on that high plateau. Whisky won't warm a man up there and artificial heat is unknown. Fame, fortune and formaldehyde await the empire-builder who will put a steam-heat pipe across the Andes.

The Fourth came at last. Just as the early morning mist was sweeping over the pampa in a whirl of silver, the special train bearing the president and his party came shrieking into Ororo, bedecked with flags and flowers and bunting, and twelve hours late. During the trip, the private box car of the illustrious executive jumped the newly laid track six times and the locomotive made a handspring twice. Equal to the occasion, the gifted conductor explained in his Douglas, Arizona, Spanish that this was part of the entertainment program, being merely intended to show how skilful Americans are in getting trains back on the tracks. As the man concluded his remarks with "*Viva Andesia*," he got away with it.

In due time, the procession started down the narrow, twisting streets to the Plaza. First came the infantry, with a band of sixty-two and a half pieces, preceded by six little drummer-boys in red coats and yellow trousers, with white gaiters over their ankles and stiff little cockades in their hats. Then the cavalry, with their scarlet pennants flapping in the breeze and the little, sun-dried president, incrusted with yards of gold lace and encased in royal purple socks, seated in a carriage by the side of Zoila Chimbota. Bringing up the rear was a body-guard of lancers, in gaudy hussar uniforms.

The broad-minded, diplomatic action of the president in inviting the prima donna to ride with him, roused the people to an unprecedented state of enthusiasm, for they knew that all Chile would hear of the gracious compliment which had been paid by a rival republic to one of her fairest daughters. They gave forth one tremendous cheer after another, and from their balconies threw rose-petals, confetti, old shoes and other tokens of affection.

Zoila looked divine. She wore a plain champagne-colored gown of some delicate, cheese-clothy material, trimmed with laces, buttons, bows, braids, pleats, frills and flounces. It had a heroically low-cut neck, short sleeves edged with rabbit's fur and white tulle, and was covered from stem to stern with hand-embroidered sunflowers, forget-me-knots and poppies. Her hat was a botanical-garden affair about three feet in circumference.

IN THE name of the President of the United States, the New York bankers and the Bureau of South American Republics, Mons. Hennessy received Señor Catalino at the door of the hotel and, radiant with triumph, led him into the dining-room, where a sumptuous but light breakfast of tinned salmon, crabmeat, lobster, ox tongue, English plum pudding and champagne was served. Everything passed creditably off and every one was quite sober when the Minister of the Interior, bearing the cushion on which rested the silver hammer and jeweled spike, started the procession back to the railroad-track for the inauguration ceremony.

As Zoila was about to leave the hotel, Jit Salt came rushing breathlessly forward, his face as pale as his collar.

"Zoila," he panted, "did you eat any breakfast?"

"I certainly did," answered the prima donna, picking her teeth with a hatpin. "I had some of the swellest fricasseed salmon I ever laid my teeth on. Why, what's the matter? You appear to be somewhat disturbed."

Jit began to look very sick.

"I've just heard that the Opposition

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intended to poison the president at this banquet," he stammered.

Zoila's eyes grew wide with terror.

"And they always use slow poison, don't they, Jit?" she asked, clinging hysterically to him.

Jit wiped away a pair of tears and nodded gravely.

For a second, the prima donna stared wildly at her palpitating manager, then, with a long-drawn, blood-coagulating yell that echoed its way over the tawny mountains in the east, she swooned.

This delayed the procession three hours. During that time four doctors, two engineers and one blacksmith worked over Zoila and, in an attempt to resurrect her, poured nearly all the brandy in Ororo down her throat. When at last she opened her big black eyes and found that she was still alive and safe in the hotel, she threw her chubby arms in the air and, to the mortification of the president and his aides, cried, "Gather round boys, gather round. It was only a false alarm, after all."

The president nervously twirled his mustache with his kid-gloved fingers and suggested that she retire, but Zoila would have none of it. History was in the making and she wanted to be in on the make. Had she not promised to sing "God Save the King," while some one was driving a silver locomotive into a hammer with a golden spike? Of course she had.

And though they coaxed and cajoled her for half an hour, it was all in vain. Nothing but decapitation would stop her from singing at that ceremony. It was at this hopeless conjuncture that Jit's brilliant mind suggested a way out of the difficulty. He informed his prima donna that, in order to allow her to rest, the grand procession to the roundhouse and the dedication of the railroad had been postponed until the following day.

TO THIS she nodded her assent, and the president and his party withdrew in glee. Of course Jit's story was notoriously false, for almost immediately the procession started. Unfortunately, however, the band began to play and the strains of the music reached Zoila's ears, whereupon she staggered to her window to ascertain the reason for such unwonted jubilation. Thirty seconds later she came tearing down the street and in one terrific bound entered the president's carriage, threw her brawny arms about the ruler's neck and lovingly embraced him in full view of the populace. Sad to relate, just at that very moment the wife of the president, who had arrived in town the previous day, appeared on a balcony that she might throw rose-petals at her husband. She always did this in public. In private—but no, that is none of our business. Above all things, let us respect the sacredness of the home.

You are now requested to believe that the frantic Mrs. President, as soon as she had recovered from the first shock, jumped from the balcony to the sidewalk—a distance of approximately fifteen feet. You will perhaps prefer not to do this, but it is true, nevertheless. The next moment, the acrobatic first-lady-of-the-land was tearing "Exhibit A" from the hair of Senorita Zoila Chimbota with one hand and shaking her husband as a dog shakes a rat with the other. Not a man in the presidential body-guard moved a whisker; one and all were petrified with amazement.

Finally, the portly Minister of War issued forth to the assistance of his master. In a fraction of a second he was on his back, squirming like a big black beetle. The Indians in the crowd were uproarious. They clapped and cheered and threw their hats high into the air, believing in their simple minds that it was all in the day's festivities.

As the women lacerated and mutilated each other in a gentle, ladylike way, the terrified president slipped from the carriage and tore hatless and almost hairless down the crowded street, screeching like a youngster with *colicus green-applus*, and bowling over the vice-president and several cabinet-ministers in his mad passage.

It was the most pitiable sight that man ever witnessed.

III

WHILE this was happening, Mons. Hennessy had been waiting in the shadow of the triumphal arch to receive His Excellency, filling in the time very profitably by memorizing his Spanish speech. Suddenly he heard an astounding diversity of noises. He looked up and saw the president rushing toward the track, his white-plumed hat missing, his hair unkempt,

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his clothing grievously disarranged. Behind, as if driven by some centrifugal force, came a troup of cavalry, a regiment of infantry and part of a procession.

"*Dios mio*," cried Hennessy, whipping out his .45 Colt's, "another revolution."

Just as he was about to fire a blank cartridge at the mob, to scare them away, Catalino held up his hand.

"Don't shoot," he yelled. "Everything's all right."

"It looks it," said the perspicacious Hennessy with a grin, as he reholstered his revolver.

Forthwith the president plunged into breathless explanations, at the conclusion of which the engineer led him into a tent hard by and opened up a bottle. Presently Hennessy came out and invited the perspiring aides, cabinet-ministers and official hangers-on to revive their drooping spirits also. The champagne warmed and comforted their swarthy bosoms and flushed their swarthy cheeks. The world grew rosy once again. Of a sudden it was discovered that in the scrimmage the Minister of the Interior had lost the silver hammer.

The poor fellow was crushed beyond words and sat with hanging head, a perfect picture of distress. Luckily for him, the golden spike with its sparkling diamonds was safe, as also was the cushion. Blue with rage, the president despatched a score of untrained detectives on the trail of the missing weapon.

As, however, the afternoon was wearing on, it was decided not to postpone the inauguration pending the location of the hammer, and an ordinary wooden mallet was substituted. Whereupon Catalino gathered himself together, borrowed a high hat to replace his own, and, at the head of his entourage, marched solemnly up the carpeted stairs to the platform, keeping a furtive eye on the horizon for outward and visible signs of his wife. By this time there was a crowd of several thousand excited natives, in incongruous colors of attire, round the platform. It was an awe-inspiring sight.

Suddenly a shrill blast from a bugle announced that the function, which would go down to history for more reasons than one, was about to begin. A hush fell over the assembly.

First, the archbishop blessed the railroad, including the two locomotives, the rolling-stock, bridges, trestles and culverts. A few days later, when he went to buy a ticket to La Piña, and the imported Mexican booking-clerk said, "Sixteen pesos, señor; free list entirely suspended," the reverend gentleman revoked the blessing and substituted inferior goods. But that is ahead of the story.

NEXT, Hennessy, chief engineer, made his very first speech in the language Española, or rather essayed to make it. He had intended to say a lot of beautiful things about hands-across-the-Panama-Canal, to emphasize the fact that all men, irrespective of breed or brogue, are brothers after the sixth cocktail, and to dilate at length upon the mighty empire of Andesia and the enviable position she occupies among the august family of nations, but for two reasons he didn't say anything of the kind.

First, he was platform-struck and second, he forgot his lines. When he did finally jerk open the floodgates of his peroration, the burden of his song ran thus:

"Mr. President, señores and gentlemen: Unaccustomed as I am to building railroads in public, especially in a foreign tongue, I am here on the Cuatro de Julio to say to you that when, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary to build railroads for the powers of the earth, we, the representatives of the United States of America, take pleasure in presenting to you the railroad from La Piña to Ororo. *Viva Andesia.*"

Then he sat down, oozing perspiration from every pore, but immensely proud of himself. For a long moment there was silence. At length it dawned upon some mahogany-faced diplomat that he ought to cheer and this he did. Immediately the cry of "*Viva los Yanquis*" was taken up in all quarters, but of course the Yankees themselves made the most noise.

Here the president rose, and for several minutes cries of "*Viva Andesia*," "*Viva la Republica*" and "*Viva Catalino*," filled the air. The crowd might have been viva-ing yet, had not some one leaned against the triumphal arch and pushed it over on the platform. For a time it was feared that casualties might ensue, but when the débris was cleared away and an inventory taken of each man's arms and legs, it was found that none were missing. Therefore the ceremony continued.

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Though he timorously cast his eyes about him and seemed harassed and ill at ease, the president delivered a masterful oration. The applause that greeted its conclusion lasted fully a quarter of an hour.

Yet a while and the band struck up the national anthem. A second later, a silver-toned voice that was like the voice of an angel took up the refrain. The effect was startling in the extreme. Even the band ceased playing, to gaze at the singer. It was Zoila Chimbota! She had changed her hat and gown and looked fresh as a new-born rose. With dramatic suddenness, she mounted the platform, motioned the band to continue and burst forth again. Her figure silhouetted against the bright hues of a gorgeous sunset that turned the snow-carpeted mountains to blood and gold, she sang the old, old song. It was so beautiful, it was weird, unearthly, unreal.

When the last refrain swept away over the sterile pampa, Catalino bent a stiff knee and, after carefully scanning the landscape, chivalrously kissed the prima donna's hand. The crowd cheered tempestuously, so much so that Zoila, ever ready like the bee to improve the shining hour, instructed Jit to pass the hat. While this was being done, the prima donna and Catalino sat chatting pleasantly together.

TEN minutes passed. Of a sudden, the Minister of the Interior sprang into the air with a fearful cry. The golden spike had been stolen, this time. A second previously it had been lying in state on the red-velvet cushion across his knees, but now it was gone. The symbol of peace and prosperity and Yankee aggressiveness had vanished. President Catalino's face blanched and his body shook like a reed in the wind. The minister wept, wept bitterly, while as for Hennessy, he broke out in a string of track-camp profanity that fairly singed the hair.

This was the greatest catastrophe that Andesia had ever known. A hurried consultation took place on the platform and a search was instigated but, though it was prosecuted eagerly, it was all to no purpose. The faces of all became unanimously anxious. Officially, the railroad would have to remain unfinished. With a voice full of tears, the president turned and explained the situation to his people, advising them that the rest of the ceremony would have to be indefinitely postponed, and calling upon them to help the police to locate the guilty person. Instant death was the promised punishment for the thief.

'Twas a melancholy procession that marched back through the twilight to the hotel; gloom and despair gripped the hearts of all. Catalino's face bore every mark of dejection.

Fearful lest "Faust," the opera arranged for that evening's performance, might be canceled on account of the mourning into which the country had been plunged, Zoila put the question to the president. For a while he meditated, then he nodded gravely.

"Let the festivities continue," he said in a voice that quavered like an old man's. "We have had enough disappointments for one day. But, instead of grand opera, give us something light to cheer us up."

And so it was agreed.

At nine o'clock, when Manager Jit climbed the ladder to roll up the curtain, every seat in the theater was taken. Catalino was not accompanied by his wife. She was raging about the house, clutching a bunch of hair in one hand, a part of a champagne-colored gown in the other.

"Exhibit A, exhibit B," she muttered constantly to herself, as if learning a recitation for a commencement-exercise. "Exhibit A, exhibit B." In the end, the poor woman sat down, wrote a farewell note to her unfaithful husband, and went out into the night. Next to having a bank call a loan, there is nothing worse than to have your wife write a farewell note and go out into the night, especially when she remembers to take her diamonds with her.

THE play selected was "The Pirate's Bride." In the last act, the bride, who in this case was Zoila, rescues her groom from the glistening teeth of a pasteboard circular-saw, just as it is about to cleave him in twain. It is one of those heart-paralyzing scenes that makes you feel as if you are being browned on a griddle.

Dressed in a black silk dress with yellow awnings, Zoila came panting on the stage, having just escaped from a boat as it was about to go over Buenosdias Falls, a drop of nine hundred and fifty feet into a boiling cauldron of water below. This, of course, she explained—there were no eye-witnesses.

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After she had been in the old sawmill anywhere from twenty minutes to half an hour, the bride's eyes suddenly fell upon her husband, bound hand and foot. The cruel teeth of the saw were coming nearer every second and he was not insured!

The silence was awful. Quick as a flash of lightning, Zoila whipped out the long carving knife that she always carried in her manicure-set, rushed to her husband, slashed the cruel bonds and pulled him away. Another one-sixtieth of a second and she would have been a widow.

The crowd broke loose in a terrific thunder of acclaim. Money, jewels, flowers, hair-puffs, rats and side-combs were showered upon the stage.

Zoila approached the footlights and, while Jit went to get a wheelbarrow to gather up the presents, she thanked the audience for their tokens of love and appreciation. Then she stooped and began to gather up the coin of the realm first, audibly reckoning the while. "One and a half, one sixty, one seventy-five, one——"

Of a sudden something dropped from the folds of her skirts with a loud, metallic ring. It was the jeweled spike! Without a blush of guilt upon her face or the faintest sign of self-incrimination, the prima donna took the spike in her hand, came quickly forward and held it aloft.

"Will the person who threw this on the stage stand up?" she requested, in a bland, serene manner. "The president would like to meet him."

The crowd cheered vociferously but no one stood up. Followed a remarkable demonstration. Men embraced each other and women wept bitterly with joy. The railroad could now be officially completed.

Early next morning, as the Indians were driving their patient llamas through the silent streets, President Catalino escorted Zoila Chimbota safely out of town.

"I knew you'd make some blunder," he said as he shook her hand for the last time. "That's the worst of trusting a woman."

Then he said good-by and rode off over the pampa in search of his wife.

King Corrigan's Treasure

by H. D. Couzens

CHAPTER XXII

THE HOSTAGE

FOR a space there was not a sound save from Anita, who had fallen to her knees, her face covered, sobbing wildly. Then Marvin confronted Englehart jauntily.

"Captain," said he, "I know you to be a man of your word, as well as a brave one. I know that now you will give us the true location of the wreck. I am sorry I had to practise a bit of my surgery on your supercargo, but I can promise that in a very few minutes he will be as well as ever. There are ways and means, you know, and this is my way," and the little man laughed an uncanny giggle that was chilling to hear.

Englehart turned away. "Anson!" said he.

Anson left Anita and came forward.

"God knows you're low enough," said Englehart, "but I'd rather talk to you. As

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this skunk says, I'll keep my word and you know it. Now bring my boats ashore and let us get out of your company."

"How about those bearings?"

"Do you think I'm a walking Hydrographic Office? You'll have to come aboard and get the chart."

Marvin knelt over Harvey and vigorously applied some form of massage to his arms and shoulders, working the arms up and down as he did so. All were watching him with a sort of fearful fascination. Then he dipped a hatful of water and threw it in Winthrop's face.

Harvey gasped, sat up and drew a long breath. He slowly flexed his arms and the movement gave him great and sickening pain. He groaned aloud. He was quite bewildered, but his eyes fell upon Marvin and he looked at him long and fixedly.

"You —— scoundrel!" said he.

"Come, come, Mr. Winthrop; don't call names. All's fair in this business and I had to apply my own methods to fit this particular case. Barring a little soreness that will soon pass, you are as sound as ever and if I were in your place, I'd thank fortune that I was alive at this moment."

Harvey looked at the soft-spoken creature with loathing in his eyes, but remained silent.

"Come," said Anson, "we'll be moving. There's dirty weather brewing."

"Take off these lashings," said Englehart.

"Presently," said Anson. "Time enough for that."

"Still afraid, with your standing army behind you?" sneered Englehart.

Doctor Marvin stepped behind him, opening his knife.

"Allow me," said he, and cut the cord that bound Englehart's arms.

ENGLEHART walked over to Harvey, put two strong hands under his arms and heaved him to his feet as easily as though he were a child.

"Cheer up, lad!" said he, in a low voice, accompanied by a light pat on the back that just then meant more to Harvey than anything else in the world.

They moved along the beach slowly and listlessly. The night's work had been sufficient for even the most hardened of that calloused company. Harvey, unable with his swollen ankle to keep up with the rest, lagged behind. He was very sick and tired and his bones ached, but most of all he was shocked, by the thing that had been done to him, into a kind of mental numbness and, withal, a feeling of humiliation. And he knew now, to the full measure, the meaning of the word "hate."

He heard a rustle behind him and turned, just as Anita stole up and put an arm about him. Her face was wet with tears.

"Oh, Harvey!" she cried. "You poor, poor boy!"

"Oh, I'm all right," said he, a little wildly. "It was a pretty rough deal, though, wasn't it? Doctor Marvin is certainly a genius."

"He is a monster!" He put an arm around her shoulders and they walked on. "I wonder when all this will be over," said she. "It's all so awful, and to-night——" she held her arm tight about his waist. "And to think, it's only such a little while since it all seemed so beautiful here."

"I'm rather sick of it myself," said Harvey. "I know when I've had enough. The end's coming soon, though. Things are moving too rapidly not to reach a crisis before long."

"But they've got what they want now. There won't be any more fighting, will there?"

"I give it up. I guess that will be up to Englehart. I'm glad we got a compromise, anyway, even at the price—ugh! It was the only way to make Billy give in. Did you see his eyes when he was talking to Anson?"

"Yes. He's the strongest character I ever saw. I believe all you've said of him."

"Winthrop!" called a voice in the distance.

Harvey turned to her. "You must go back, Nita. Try not to worry, for you're going with us on the *Albicore*. Be patient, won't you?"

"I'll try, but how can I ever face those awful men again? Doctor Marvin——" suddenly she straightened up. "Forgive me, Harvey, I'm talking like a little coward. I'll try to be brave and strong and patient—till you come."

He kissed her and she clung to him for a long moment. There was a brighter glow behind them and then Anson's voice, near by, called,

"Winthrop, are you there?"

"Aye, coming!" said Harvey.

He kissed her again. "Good night, Nita,"

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said he, and went to meet Anson, who was holding a lantern, a score of yards away.

"Hurry along, Winthrop," said he. "You're wanted here."

"Can't be done. I've got a sprained ankle. Also I've had about enough mauling to put me out of commission."

He was wondering how much Anson had seen.

THE rest were gathered in a group directly inshore from where a lantern showed the *Albicore* to be at anchor. Anson took a boat-call from his pocket and blew sharply, receiving a hail from the schooner in reply. Three boats, two of the *Kestrel's* and one of the *Albicore's* put off and came slowly toward the shore, for there were but two men in each. The *Albicore's* crew boarded their own boat, some of them having to be helped over the gunwale, till all were aboard but Englehart and Winthrop. Englehart turned to Anson.

"I've a chart of those bearings. Come aboard with me and I'll give it to you."

"All right; Pratt will go."

Englehart looked at the big man with the ghost of a smile.

"Very well; get aboard, Pratt," he ordered. "Come along, Winthrop!"

"Wait a moment," said Marvin. "Mr. Winthrop is not going!"

"Why not?"

"At least not at present. Mr. Winthrop will stay with us as a hostage till we have everything shipshape."

"You mean, till you get the chart?"

"No. Till we find the wreck. This is only a mild precaution, Captain Englehart. I don't mean to suggest that you won't give us the true bearings, and, as soon as we have verified them and found the wreck, Mr. Winthrop may return to the *Albicore*. It's only fair, Captain. At any rate, it is final."

For a moment Harvey thought Englehart about to spring at Marvin. His fists clenched and, if fierce hate could have harmed him, that in Billy's eyes would have annihilated the Doctor. As for himself, the arrangement suited very well. He would be nearer Anita; could see her from the *Kestrel's* deck and perhaps find a way to communicate with her. It offered possibilities, to say the least.

"It's all right, Billy," said he. "I'm the goat. If that's their code, let 'em go as far as they want to."

Englehart turned to Anson.

"I want to see Winthrop alone," said he.

Anson nodded and they walked down the beach. Englehart put a hand on Harvey's sore shoulder. Harvey winced, but the touch was gladdening.

"Son," said Billy, "you've had a tough deal. I can't leave you here."

"You must, Billy. They won't stand for anything short of it. They can't do any worse to me than they did to-night."

Englehart took his hand and, to Harvey's wonder, the man of iron was shaking.

"Winthrop, I'm sorry for that—sorrier than I've ever been in my life. That man Marvin isn't human. He knew the only way on earth to get at me. Another thing, lad: I'm not good at apologies, but I'm sorry I was so raw to you when you walked into us there. I was bitter, of course, but at that, it was my mistake. I could have played my hand against this chuckle-head without you and got you clean out of it, too. I was a fool. And it was fine and manly for you to come in that way and take your medicine with the rest of us."

The Captain's voice was unsteady and Harvey, weakened as he was, had hard work choking down something in his throat and blinking back the tears.

"'"Thanks, Captain, from you, this——"

"And another thing," Englehart set his jaw and shook off his temporary weakness, "they are going to pay, my lad. They are going to pay for what they did to you to-night! Trust me for that."

"Why, Billy, we're beaten men."

"Think so? Well, I'll tell you something. As long as your Uncle Billy's alive he'll always have a shot in the locker. To make them pay for to-night's work, I'm going to wipe this nest of rats off the map. They'll never lay a finger on Corrigan's money and they'll never sail that schooner out of that channel. I pay my grudges, son, and I never boast. Now let's go back."

THEY rejoined the others. Englehart wrung Harvey's hand, with a bare "Good night," and with Pratt in the bow the boat set off for the *Albicore*.

Harvey, faint and weary, threw himself down on the sand. He had a sense of inward exaltation. It was as though his talk with Englehart had changed the whole

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face of the situation, even though he felt that, for once, the Captain was extravagant.

Anson came and stood beside him.

"How do you feel, Winthrop?" he asked.

Harvey looked up, surprised. There was a strange, kindly note in the big Captain's voice.

"Oh, I'm all right," said he.

"I'm sorry Marvin used you that way. It was pretty brutal. You mustn't think I'm inhuman enough to approve of that sort of thing. You must be jolly well used up, with that bad ankle and all. How would you like to stay ashore to-night?"

Harvey sat up abruptly. Ashore! He could not believe his ears. Anita was ashore and here was Anson, in the most friendly tone, suggesting that he stay ashore, too!

Had Harvey been his normal self, he might have viewed the suggestion with instant suspicion, but his thought-process was unbalanced. The suggestion was good; it appealed to him; it was his heart's desire—he would accept without question.

"Yes," continued Anson, "there's a nasty blow coming before morning and doubtless you'd find it more comfortable and feel less like a prisoner. There's plenty of grub down below and you can bunk in one of the tents. I'll send anything else you want from the ship. I'll ask you to pass your word not to board the *Albicore* or communicate with your people. How does it strike you?"

"Why, thank you, Captain, I believe I'd like it." Harvey tried hard to keep the gladness out of his voice.

"You've been rather hardly used," Anson went on, "and as we have what we want, we can afford to be generous. I don't believe you're fit for any more walking, so we'll take you along shore in one of the boats."

The *Albicore's* boat returned and Pratt leaped out to the beach. Instantly the men backed water, the boat swung round and was lost in the darkness. Pratt was chuckling as he handed Anson a folded paper. It was evident that he had sampled some of the *Albicore's* gin.

"Well, wot d'ye think, sir?" said he, "bli' me if that little bunch of dynamite didn't 'ave this 'ere paper in the pocket of his shirt all the time!"

CHAPTER XXIII

TREACHERY

AS HARVEY sat in Anson's boat he began to distrust the optimistic turn that events appeared to have taken. He began vaguely to suspect an ulterior motive in the invitation to sleep ashore. There had been no question of the heartiness of the big man's bland British voice, but the thing was unconvincing, unreal; it did not fit in with conditions. The thought did not crystallize. It was merely a vague impression, a fleeting doubt as he sat, huddled up, in the boat.

There was a light in Anita's tent and, as the boat grounded, she came out with Minnie and stood watching while Anson and Winthrop stepped ashore.

"Here we are," said Anson. "I think you'll find comfortable quarters, Winthrop. There's plenty to eat and a drop or two to drink, if I'm not mistaken. You can choose either tent you like."

"Choose either tent? Why——"

"To be sure. Miss Anita is coming aboard with us to-night. Come, Miss Anita, the storm may break any moment now. Please hurry!"

"Do you mean, Captain Anson, that I am to go aboard the *Kestrel?*"

"Certainly. If there's anything here you need, get it and hurry."

"But I'm not going. I'm going to stay here, Captain Anson. I refuse to go."

"Lee! Morrison!" called Anson sharply. "Come ashore!" Two of the sailors dropped their oars and obeyed. "Miss Anita, I'm sorry, but if you do not get into that boat at once I shall order my men to put you there."

"Captain——" began Winthrop.

"That will do, Mr. Winthrop. I command here. Come, Miss Anita!"

The girl looked at the two grinning sailors, then at Anson, unutterable scorn in her eyes. Then, without a word, she stepped into the bow of the boat, Minnie silently following like a faithful dog. Anson took his place in the stern and the sailors dipped their oars. Presently out of the darkness came Anson's voice: "Good night, Winthrop!"

The storm broke, but Harvey, unheeding the rain, the cutting wind or the encroaching sea that swept far up the beach, sat gnawing

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his fingers in a state bordering on frenzy. Sometimes, unable to sit with his thoughts, he paced back and forth with rapid strides, regardless of his injured ankle.

"Fool, fool!" he cried, and raged impotently.

With the dawn, the storm increased in violence. Over on the windward shore, the roar of the surf was prodigious. The lagoon was a heaving mass of dirty gray water and, in the driving rain, only momentary glimpses could be had of the *Kestrel*, plunging like a bucking horse. Harvey roused himself from a coma into which he had fallen, lying in a shallow pool of water. The tents, in the most sheltered spot on the island, were standing, in one of them the lantern still burning, and into this Harvey crawled, making an effort to arouse his torpid senses. Among other things scattered about, he found a flask of brandy, and took a huge swallow. Then he removed his coat, rolled over on the blankets and was instantly asleep.

WHEN he awoke, the red rays of the setting sun were mingling with those of the expiring lantern. Mechanically he felt for a cigarette and, at the touch of his damp clothes, remembered. He rose, extinguished the lantern and looked out. The storm had blown itself out, as the short tropical gales are apt to do in a few hours. The water of the lagoon was still roily, but the wind had gone down and the sun was setting in a riot of splendor. The air was as sweet and invigorating as wine.

Harvey, in spite of the strenuous events of the previous night, felt greatly refreshed. The soreness had gone from his arms and only an occasional twinge remained to remind him of his sprained ankle. He was hungry, and recalled that a cup of coffee on the *Albicore* the previous afternoon was all the nourishment he had had for thirty-six hours. Rummaging about in the tent, he discovered a small keg of fresh water, some biscuit and several tins of food; also, what pleased him exceedingly, a full tin of Anita's cigarettes. With a stiff drink of brandy as a beginning, he made a very satisfactory meal, then lit a cigarette from a water-proof case of matches he had found, and sat down to think it over.

His hysteria of the night before, which had been partly revulsion of feeling and partly the result of the experiences of the night, had passed. Nevertheless, Harvey was a changed man. The light-hearted youth of the previous morning, questing for adventure, was gone forever. He recalled his joyousness at bluffing Anson as something wholly puerile. At the time he would have shaken hands with his antagonist and cried quits the next minute. But now he saw the grimness of the whole business, the perfidy of Anson and the atrocious Marvin, the meaness and unfairness of it all, and he knew that defeat of the other man was not a sporting event to glory in and preen oneself upon, but a necessity to self-preservation. And he also knew that he must either die on Paradise Island or see the score paid off in full.

The sun set and it grew dark. He found a tin of oil and filled the lantern, but he forebore lighting it. The sky was clear of clouds, a wonderful host of stars was winking, and a crescent moon, like a silver paring, was balanced overhead. As night closed down, the wind died out entirely and the restless water of the lagoon quieted as if by magic, only the sob of a long roller on the reef and the whisper of the wash on the beach disturbing the stillness of a perfect tropic night.

Harvey lay prone, smoking and thinking. What was to be the end of it all? What could Englehart, with the meager resources at hand, do to make good his promise to "wipe out" the *Kestrel's* crew? Harvey mentally reviewed these resources. He tried to think of every possible strategy where they could be used to advantage, and all seemed ludicrously hopeless. In short they were, as he had told Englehart, beaten men.

SOMETHING stirred in the lagoon. He took it at first for a turtle blowing. Then, before him, not twenty yards away, he saw something dark moving. Decidedly it was not a turtle. He watched with almost painful alertness as the object came nearer and then, in the shoal water, something raised itself and came splashing shoreward. He ran forward, his nerves on a tension, and at the water's edge met Anita Corrigan in a bathing-suit.

"Harvey!" she cried, startled, "why haven't you lit the lantern? I've been——" She got no further for, all dripping as she was, he took her in his arms.

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For a while the girl struggled for breath, for the swim had exhausted her. She threw herself down on the sand and he sat beside her, too overcome for words.

"Harvey," she said, "I'm tired to death but I must tell you this quickly. You must get to Captain Englehart at once and warn him. They are going to break faith with him, board the *Albicore* and burn it, and heaven knows what else. It means all our lives, I think—all of us—oh, the despicable creatures!" She sobbed, hysterically.

"Minnie heard it. Since last night I've been locked in my room alone. They wouldn't even let me have Minnie. When she brought me food, Captain Anson unlocked the door till she had left it and then locked it again. Heaven knows what would have happened if the *Kestrel* hadn't been dragging her anchor. They were all busy trying to keep her from going on the reef. Minnie found a key somewhere that fitted the door and came in twice. The first time she told me she had heard the Captain and Doctor Marvin planning this and told me to get ready to swim ashore to you. I put on my bathing-suit. Then she came again when most of them were out in the boats, taking soundings to see how near we had drifted to the reef. She suddenly put out the lights and I managed to slip over the side without being seen. Harvey! What's that!"

She pointed. A short distance away another dripping figure arose and came splashing to the beach.

"Miss Nita!" called a voice, "oh, Miss Nita, is you there?"

"Oh!" cried the girl, "it's Minnie. Here I am, Minnie!"

The figure came forward, then stopped. The girl had on only a short, dark-colored undergarment that clung to her skin, and something that hung from a loop over one shoulder.

"Miss Nita, please bring me that wrapper of mine in the tent. This heah way, I ain't noways fit to be seen."

Nita darted in and found the wrapper and in a few moments Minnie was properly clothed.

"They don't know you's gone yet, Miss Nita. I don't believe he'll open that do' till they get back. Mistah Winth'op, I reckon Miss Nita tole you what I heard. It was Doctuh Mahvin's idea. Cap'n Anson was for holdin' back, but the Doctuh said they ought to strike when there weren't no one suspectin'. Those were his words, suh. They're goin' to burn the ship and set everybody asho' that ain't killed, so they can get clear away with this heah treashuh. They're goin' to start right soon. Mistuh Winth'op, you better hurry, suh!"

Although it was bright starlight, the sea was dark and the contour of the beach baffling and confusing. Harvey took no risk of wrenching an ankle this time and they proceeded with caution. There were no lights on deck or in the rigging of the *Albicore*, but they could see a glow from the open companion and the broken skylight.

"Wait here on the beach," said Harvey, "and if all is well I'll be back in half an hour."

He threw off his coat, kicked off his shoes and struck out for the schooner.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LAST OF THE *ALBICORE*

THE *Albicore* lay in deep water about a cable's length away and Harvey reached her scarcely blown, for he was a strong swimmer. He heard an unusual activity about the deck. Men seemed to be bustling and calling to each other and this led Harvey to hope that Englehart had some sort of warning and was preparing. He hauled himself up, with some difficulty, between a bowsprit-shroud and the bobstay, then threw a leg over the bowsprit, crawled aft to the topgallant-forecastle and from there leaped lightly to the deck into the arms of a man who stood there, apparently waiting for him. The man seized him in a grip of iron.

"Wot's this?" said he in a husky voice. "Come aft 'ere and let's 'ave a look at you."

He propelled Harvey the length of the deck in his iron clutch till they reached the open companion, where he shoved his face into the light.

"Ho!" said he, "it's you, my bucko, is it? You 'ave a 'abit of droppin' in unexpected-like, you 'ave!"

It was Ben Pratt, mate of the *Kestrel*.

"Come below and join the circle. They'll be main glad to see you, that they will. Ho, mates, look 'oo's dropped in on us!"

He shoved Harvey down the stair into

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the cabin where, around the table, were Anson, Marvin and the second mate of the *Kestrel*, a hawk-nosed, bilious man with a watch-cap perched far back on his head. For the second time in twenty-four hours Harvey found himself making a dramatic entrance. Doctor Marvin gasped like some weird fish; the second mate stared and chewed tobacco so vigorously that a brown stream oozed down from each corner of his mouth. Anson gaped, opened his mouth several times to speak, stuck his monocle in his eye and finally exclaimed, "Well, I'm damned!"

They were all standing, but Pratt hastily slid to a seat on a transom and reached for a half-emptied "square-face" of gin and a tumbler on the table.

"Will you please explain, Mr. Winthrop, what the devil this means?" said Anson. "Where are your men?"

"I give it up," said Harvey. "I admit that the surprise is mutual."

"Do you mean that they are not ashore?"

Harvey considered a moment. It was a time to weigh one's words. However, there was only one obvious answer.

"No," said he, "not that I am aware of."

Anson stared at Marvin.

"Then of course, in coming aboard here, you've broken your parole," said Marvin, severely.

HARVEY laughed aloud. It was a tragic moment, but he could not have helped it to save his life.

"It strikes me that my parole was that I was not to communicate with my friends. I was not to board the *Albicore*, but it's rather a different matter when she is in the hands of the enemy. Did you come on a friendly visit, or with a flag of truce?"

Pratt was applying himself industriously to the gin, gulping down half a tumblerful at a time. Doctor Marvin sat down and leaned his elbows on the table.

"There's no use asking you why you came aboard, Mr. Winthrop?"

"No!"

"Nor where Englehart and your men have gone?"

"No!"

"May I ask if you have broken your parole at all; that is, have you, up to this time, communicated with your friends in any way?"

"Under the circumstances, your question is a joke. So are all of them. You break an agreement with the Captain and me and come here on the same errand as last night, and to burn my ship. However, I'll answer. No!"

Marvin banged his fist on the table.

"I have it, Paul, out of his own mouth. He knew we were coming, came to warn Englehart and found us ahead of him. Paul, it's those —— women. I told you to lock up that nigger wench, too, and you forgot to do it!"

Harvey could have bitten off his tongue.

"I believe I did forget it in the hurry," said Anson uncomfortably, "but we left two men in charge. They would have looked after her."

"Rot!" said Marvin.

For a moment there was silence and then from far across the water there came the sound of a single shot. Every man fairly jumped and they stared at each other. A man stuck his head in the companion.

"This ship's afire, sir!"

"What!" roared Anson.

"Yes, sir. We took off the fore-'atch, sir, to see if they was 'idden there, and the 'old's all ablyze, sir."

"Marvin, do you hear that? By God, that means Englehart! We're double-crossed!"

But Marvin was already bounding up the stair, followed by the second mate. Anson followed, turning to yell,

"Take charge of that man, Pratt, and bring him along!"

Pratt was gulping a tumbler of gin, but he reached out a paw, caught Harvey by the shirt and pulled him to a seat on the transom. He clutched his arm in a grip that nearly broke the bones.

"I'll take charge, right enough," he growled. "You're a slippery customer, you are, Mr.—*hic*—Shupercargo."

Harvey's other arm was hanging by his side. His hand touched something and mechanically closed over it. It was cold and heavy and satisfying as he lifted and balanced it. It was, in fact, one of several two-quart bottles of "square-face" standing in a case at the end of the transom. Pratt gave his arm another wrench.

"Come, mate, we'll be goin'."

"All right, Mr. Pratt. Needn't be rough. I'll go with you."

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PRATT looked fondly at the gin bottle. Then, the temptation being altogether too strong, he released Harvey and grasped bottle and tumbler. Some one was yelling for him outside. He bent over and slopped more gin into the tumbler. Harvey raised his arm and with all the force of his body brought the heavy bottle down on his skull. There was a burst of glass, a shower of gin and the big mate fell headlong to the floor, rolled under the table and lay still.

Harvey looked round wildly. He heard footsteps running over the deck toward the cabin. In any of the staterooms he would surely be found if they searched for him and forward, down the passage to the pantry, he saw a light and heard a strange, ominous roaring. Suddenly his eye fell on the panel door of the lazarette. It had been his original hiding-place and to it he owed his possession of the *Albicore*.

He had barely time to slip through and conceal himself behind a mass of duffel when he heard some one in the cabin. But whoever it was took only a cursory glance about and retreated. He heard steps overhead die away forward. He could hear nothing else from his dungeon, but he remembered the circular hatch above, through which Captain Cleary's mate had kicked him. He found it and shoved with the heel of his palm. The hatch gave easily and, standing on a spare hawser, he opened it cautiously and looked out. The cabin house was directly in front of him and he could see nothing, but he could hear voices, evidently from a boat.

"Did you find Pratt?" It was Anson speaking.

"No, sir; must have gone in the other boat."

"All right, get aboard there. Now pull away, men; lively now!"

The fore part of the *Albicore* was all alight. Harvey sat on the hawser and counted slowly, timing his count to about the stroke of an oar. One, two, three hundred, then another fifty for good measure. The boats would be far enough away. He threw off the hatch and pulled himself through. Roaring flames and a tall pillar of smoke were ascending from the forehatch, and the fire was breaking out from various cracks and crevices all over the fore part of the vessel. Harvey crawled around the house and, on the far side from the *Kestrel*, lowered himself into the water and swam to the beach.

CHAPTER XXV

ENGLEHART TAKES TOLL

THE *Albicore* was now burning fiercely. However small her value as a schooner, her ancient timbers made excellent firewood. She was soon ablaze from stem to stern, flames and smoke, in the still air, ascending straight upward in a roaring, awe-inspiring column. At intervals there were explosions, and at each of these, vast showers of sparks and innumerable fountains of brighter flame spurted forth.

But the wondrous thing was the birds. Round and round the burning schooner they wheeled and swung in platoons and legions, the whole feathered host of Paradise Island. They darted by hundreds into the very heart of the flame and perished there; they crowded each other out of aerial balance so that scores were continually tumbling into the water, to take flight again instantly, screaming insanely. Numbers were scorched and fell fluttering into the sea, crippled and helpless.

Harvey and Anita sat watching in silence, for in that roaring, screaming tumult, audible speech was out of the question. The schooner had been burning for about two hours, when a terrific explosion threw aloft a great blare of flame and dense black smoke. Blazing fragments flew abroad to litter the beach or fall hissing into the sea. One splintered timber, afire at one end, struck point-foremost in the sand and stood upright, burning like a torch. The store of kerosene-tins had blown up. After this the fire waned, though the hull was still burning far into the next day.

"The fish will have sugar in their tea, to-morrow," said Harvey, when they were able to hear each other speak, "not to mention roast goonies and albatross."

"You don't seem to take the loss of your schooner very much to heart."

"Eh? My schooner? Oh, I see—Harvey Winthrop, owner and supercargo. Well, Nita, she is not, and never was, my schooner, except in a very restricted sense. I've enjoyed every minute I've spent aboard the *Albicore*, barring the time of Anson's visits and when the mate kicked me into the lazarette, but I'm not like the seaman who

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stands ashore and weeps as he sees the staunch ship go down that has borne him so bravely through the perils of the deep—and so forth. As a matter of fact I believe that from a strictly legal standpoint, I'm no better than a pirate," and he told her the story of the *Albicore*.

He told it with a great deal of shrewd, dry humor, and no little boyish enthusiasm, forgetting in the telling the grimness of their present situation.

When he had finished, Anita said, "But wasn't there a question of honor involved? Not that I care. No woman would. But there ought to be some moral principle mixed up in it somewhere."

"Shouldn't wonder," said Harvey, cheerfully, "but it's so fine that you'd have to hunt for it with a high-power microscope. The only actual sufferer by the burning of this poor old hulk is myself. If I had sailed her into port, they would have had to pay me salvage, and if I had told my story and shown the plugs, the owners would have gone to jail. If Captain Cleary had sunk her, as he tried to do, the underwriters would have had to pay the insurance, and if the owners put in a claim now, at the proper time, they will have to pay, but the owners aren't going to do it. When they heard Cleary's story, you can be sure they took to cover, and at this minute I'll bet they are shaking in their shoes for fear that some fine day I'll come rollicking into port and show them up."

"Well, we both wanted new experiences. I've had mine and you seem to have had yours, too."

"I surely have," said Harvey, grave on the instant. "I wanted adventure and I've had more than enough. I've found something ten thousand times more worth while, and I'm ready to quit." He looked at her with troubled eyes. "I wish to heaven, girl, that you were safe away from here. And I'd give a whole lot to know, this minute, what has become of Billy Englehart."

They talked a while longer, till Anita's head began to droop.

"Harvey, dear," she said, "I can't hold my eyes open a minute longer."

HER bathing-suit had dried and she found a little nook in a sand gully where, with Harvey's coat for a pillow, she fell asleep. The *Albicore's* hull was still burning steadily, but the flames had changed from bright orange to a dull red and Harvey sat watching it burn with a strange fascination. It was the funeral pyre of Ben Pratt.

Harvey had no compunction or regret at his taking off of Anson's mate, but he had not told Anita this part of the night's experiences. He was surprised at his own callousness. There was not a man of the *Kestrel* whom he would not have abolished without a qualm, as he would have destroyed a dangerous beast, and considered the chance fortunate. Desperate as the situation was, he would, even now, have faced it cheerfully, waiting for what daylight would bring forth and trusting to luck and Billy Englehart, had it not been for Anita. He watched her sleeping form, dark against the white sand, with a chilly dread at his heart.

Minnie crept up beside him.

"Mistuh Winth'op, suh, I been waitin' to tell you somethin' I heard abo'd the *Kestrel*. Does you think, Mistuh Winth'op, that we evah goin' to get away from heah?"

"Well, it looks pretty blue just now, Minnie, for a fact. Our ship's gone, for one thing, but you mustn't give up hope. We're alive and well and safe, for the present at least. That's something to be thankful for, and we mustn't borrow trouble."

"Yessuh. I understand, suh. We're in a powerful bad fix. That's why I'm goin' to tell you what I heard on the *Kestrel*."

She took from her neck the object she had brought ashore with her, and Harvey saw that it was an oilskin bag, its mouth drawn tight with a draw-string. She opened it and turned out, on her lap, a revolver, a handful of cartridges and a sheath-knife on a lanyard. She handed him the revolver and cartridges.

"I brought you that, suh. I knew you didn't have one." She sat for a while, handling the knife thoughtfully, then put the lanyard round her neck and the knife in the bosom of her wrapper. "Mistuh Winth'op, I been with Miss Nita since she was bo'n. I've nussed her and raised and took care of her, the best I could, all these yeahs. I didn't want her to come down heah at all. I was 'fraid for her, and her fathah wasn't no account, nohow. He run away and lef' her mothah when Miss Nita was only a little baby. He was

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bo'n in Norfolk, but he was Irish—the bad kind that's good-lookin' and ain't got no heart at all. Miss Nita don't know nothin' 'bout him 'cause her mothah ain't nevah told her and I didn't neithuh.

"But Miss Nita was boun' to come, and all the time on that ship I was watchin', watchin' to see that no hahm come to her. I had this knife all the time. One day Cap'n Anson said somethin' when they was alone at the table. I was sittin' inside the small cabin, with the do' open. Miss Nita she didn't understand him at all. When she went on deck I went to him and says low, in his ear: 'Cap'n, if you evah says one mo' word like that to my Miss Nita, I'll jes' cut yo' heart out.' He nevah done it no mo'.

"Evah since this heah Doctuh Mahvin come abo'd I been listenin' all I could. Them two always gets togethah and talks low, but I heard a-plenty. Las' night, when I heard about them goin' to take yo' ship, I heard mo', too. Doctah Mahvin says,

"'Eithuh you got to give up that girl to Winth'op or kill her, and I don't suppose you want to do that.' Cap'n says: 'Why?' and Mahvin says: 'Because she sure knows about Corrigan and the wreck and all, and you can't sail into no port with that chest and the girl, too.' 'By the time we make port,' Cap'n says, 'by the time we make port, she won't worry me none.'

"'You know that ain't so,' Mahvin says, 'you can't stop that girl's mouth without killin' her; she ain't that kind. Give her to Winth'op,' he says, 'give her to him and let 'em both stay here and rot.' The Cap'n laughed. 'I'll give her to him,' he says, 'I suttinly will—after a while—befo' we leave,' he says."

Minnie paused and turned her somber eyes from the burning wreck to Winthrop's face.

"Mistuh Winth'op, I guess we all are in a powerful heap o' trouble. Seems like them men are boun' to get us. I had this knife all ready for Cap'n Anson befoah. Now it's all ready and sharp for somethin' else—it's for Miss Nita and me. That's why I brung you that pistol. Mistuh Winth'op, suh, you won't let them men hurt my baby, will you? Please say you won't. You know what I mean, suh! If we mus' go, let my baby girl go clean."

She laid her hand on his knee, her dark, inscrutable eyes fixed pleadingly on his face.

"Please say you won't let her come to hahm, suh!"

"I'm hoping it will never come to anything like that, Minnie."

"So am I, suh. I'm praying to Gawd it won't, suh, but if it does——" he felt her eyes bore through him.

"Minnie," said he, gently, "Miss Nita is very, very dear to me. What ever happens, I'll do my best."

"Thank you, suh!" and without another word the girl went and lay down by her mistress.

HARVEY awoke at a touch on his shoulder, to find Anita standing beside him. He had fallen asleep sitting, his head on his knees, from which posture he had not stirred. A heavy pall of smoke lay low upon the water, which was covered with flakes of soot. The charred remains of a large spar—the main boom—with a burned shred of canvas still clinging to it by the wire-lacing, had floated ashore and was wallowing in the shallow water like a corpse.

"Come, Harvey," said Anita, "I want to show you something!"

He followed her to the higher level and onward a space till they could see clear of the smoke. Anita made a sweeping gesture with her arm that included the channel and the far end of the lagoon. Harvey looked, rubbed his eyes and looked again. The *Kestrel* was gone!

The island here was rugged and they could not see to the north, but between them and the great semicircle of horizon to the south there was nothing to be seen.

"She must have gone during the night," said Anita, "for I came up here before daylight and she was not here at dawn."

"Go back and stay with Minnie," said Harvey, "and keep under cover as far as possible. I'm going to do a little exploring and gather up a breakfast. It will have to be raw eggs, for my matches are all spoiled."

Anita turned back and he walked on, warily, taking care not to show himself in the open. The birds were uneasy and his progress did not create any added disturbance that would be noticeable. He kept on till he came to a broad, clear space on which there was nothing save birds' nests and a few gnarled shrubs. Looking

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beyond, he saw something that sent him quickly back to cover behind the rolling mound from whose shelter he had just emerged. It was Paul Anson, half a mile away, studying the sea to the north.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SNEER OF MR. ANSON

HARVEY crept through the little washes and gullies till he reached a point where he could see to the northward and there, far off near the horizon, he saw the *Kestrel.* She was under easy sail, reaching along on a course parallel to the island. Anson was on the island! Obviously, then, Englehart must be aboard the *Kestrel.* Harvey's heart leaped at the thought. Anson had been outwitted at his own game of stealing ships and the situation was reversed. Englehart now held the trump-cards. At the same time, Harvey felt a deepening of the dread that hung over him. It would be only a question of time till they were discovered on the island, and what help could he expect from Englehart, ten miles out at sea?

He walked back disconsolately, his hands and pockets full of eggs, utterly cast down and angry at Billy Englehart. He was not thinking of himself. Certainly Englehart could not jeopardize his plans a second time for his sake, especially when he was in the enemy's camp on the *Albicore;* but Harvey remembered, bitterly, Englehart's estimate of Anita, and the fact that he probably would not turn his hand over to save her from Anson or anything else that had to do with the *Kestrel.*

He had gone farther than he thought and it took some time to reach the place where he had left the two women. As he reached the rise above the spot, the eggs fell from his hands and the next instant he was scrambling down the bank, tugging at the revolver in his pocket. Two hundred yards away Anita and Minnie were walking down the beach escorted by four of Anson's sailors.

He was about to follow, recklessly, with drawn revolver, when from behind him there came the sharp command,

"Halt there!"

He swung round quickly. Facing him with a cocked rifle in his hands, was the second mate of the *Kestrel.* "Been looking for you, my bucko," said he. "Stick up your hands and trot along!"

The man had him covered, but, in sheer desperation, Harvey raised the revolver and fired pointblank. The rifle exploded, then fell from the man's hands. A look of horrified surprise came over his face and then, slowly swaying, he crumpled forward in the sand. At the same instant a crushing blow struck Harvey's left shoulder and half spun him round. His arm hung limp by his side, and he stood dazed by the shock, for a moment, before he realized he had been shot by the mate. Then he looked round to see if the other sailors had heard the shot, but they had gone on at a rapid pace and were out of sight beyond a turn of the beach. Harvey picked up the second mate's rifle and hurried on after them.

The blood was flowing down his side, and he could feel his clothing soaking it up, clear to his ankle. He did not know how badly he was hurt, but, after the first shock, except for a numbing pain and a feeling of nausea, he felt strong and went on unfaltering.

SO RAPIDLY had the sailors traveled with their prisoners that by the time he saw them again they were half a mile away. They would be in the vicinity of the tents before he could hope to overtake them. He ran forward at a pace that sent the blood pumping from his wound, using caution, nevertheless, and taking advantage of the sand-gullies and such cover as the beach afforded. He was going, as he thought, to certain annihilation, but he would render an accounting first. He thought of the injunction Minnie had laid upon him the night before. At the time, he had shuddered with horror of the very thought. Now that the last extremity had come, he saw that, abhorrent as it was, he must, when the time came, carry it out.

The thought of it brought him up short. He must not blindly launch himself in the midst of these men. Neither must he stand off and shoot at them from a distance. It would only be throwing himself away in either case. He must utilize every advantage to its utmost and not strike till the very last.

The tents were on the far side of a crescent-shaped indentation of the beach, in the center of which was a high mound,

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well covered with vegetation. Beyond was the lofty knoll, and beyond that, as he could now see by the ascending smoke, the camp of Anson's men. By stealthily following the edge of the crescent, behind the mound, he might steal up behind the tents without being seen. This, by tedious progress on hands and knees, sometimes worming himself along, full-length on the ground, he managed to do. He stood, however, between the two tents, with no other concealment, for the ground here had been cleared and offered no cover of any kind.

He was trembling from head to foot, but from neither weakness nor fear. He was impatient for action that would bring the end. It was the lost-cause, forlorn-hope feeling of the soldier, or that of the outlaw, surrounded by a posse, to whom nothing remains but to die fighting.

A sailor came round the knoll and stuck his head through the tent.

"We've got the women, sir. Mr. Evans is still hunting for Winthrop, but we thought we'd best hurry back. Captain hasn't returned, sir!"

"Got the women, have you? Bring them here!"

IT WAS Marvin's voice and he came out of the tent and stood waiting. The sailor disappeared and presently returned with three or four others, bringing Anita and Minnie. Marvin walked up to them. Anita was deadly pale, but she faced him bravely, her chin up, her lithe body erect and without a tremor. Marvin spoke in low tones at first, the hideous smile on his sallow, distorted face, but as he went on, his voice raised in uncontrollable frenzy.

"So they've found you, my pretty dear! I'm glad to welcome you back. I'm sorry we can't offer you accommodations on the *Kestrel* any more. She has changed hands, you see. We haven't much hospitality of any kind to offer you, my dainty miss. We're only broken beach-combers now, thanks to you as much as anything."

Minnie rushed between him and Anita, but one of the sailors, evidently enjoying the scene hugely, caught her by the arms from behind and held her.

"Yes," Marvin continued, "we're only paupers, now, and we would have been rich men, and we'd have made you rich, too, and set you up like a queen. And now, we're adrift on the beach, thanks to you, you cursed meddler, and we can go to hell, I suppose, for all you care. For all you care, I say, blast you—you traitor——"

His voice had risen to a scream, his face worked spasmodically and his jaws slavered like those of a wolf. The man was on the verge of apoplexy.

"And I'm going to kill you, my pretty lady—I'm going to kill you with these hands. —— you, I'm going to—you——" He sprang for her, but Harvey had leaped from behind the tent and was only a yard away. His revolver was almost against the doctor's breast as he pulled the trigger. Marvin's body was actually in the air as he fired and it struck the ground head first, like a plummet, turned on its back and lay writhing. Harvey was seized by half a dozen arms and the revolver wrenched from his hand. A swarm of sailors came running round the knoll.

"Hold on there, men; don't shoot him," called a voice, and Anson came quickly down from above. "Just keep your hands on him for the present."

Minnie, released, had caught Anita in her arms. Anson cast a glance at the body of Marvin. "Well, Winthrop, you've paid a debt, I see. You owed him that, I guess. You're an active lot, you and your men. You've left me in a pretty fix. Still, I've a kick or two left, I'll tell you that, my fine fellow."

HE LEANED on his rifle and confronted Anita. For some time he stood, without a word, and the red slowly mounted in a dull wave from beneath her rolling collar to her hair. The bathing-suit revealed every curve of her supple, rounded form, and there was no mistaking his gaze. He adjusted his monocle and gloated upon her.

"Well, well, my dear, I've been wasting a lot of time. I should have been making desperate love to you instead of filling my head so completely with sunken treasure and other extraneous matters. And because I didn't, you chose to betray me to the other camp, eh? Well, well, times have changed; but it's a small matter, after all. The luck of the beach. I'm not beaten yet. But when we betray our friends, we have to pay. The law of recompense, you know."

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He flashed a glance at Harvey, who ground his teeth in impotent rage. There is no doubt that Anson was enjoying himself, after a fashion.

"Come, my dear, I've something to say to you—alone."

He held out his hand and advanced a step toward her. She shrank back, a nameless terror in her eyes. So intent was Anson, that he did not see a pair of eyes, glowing like live coals, fixed upon him with the glare of a Nemesis.

"Come," said he, and stooped to take her hand.

The movement was his bane, for Minnie, like an infuriated tigress, leaped upon him and drove her knife deep into the base of his thick neck.

At the same instant, before any of Anson's men could move, there was a volley of rifle-shots from the summit of the knoll. Half a dozen of the sailors fell. Another volley followed, and another, and they dropped where they stood, too stunned with surprise to think of returning a single shot. Englehart and a dozen of his crew stood there calmly picking them off, and, at the fourth volley, the survivors turned and ran headlong up the beach, followed by a scattering fusillade.

Minnie was holding Anita, who had fainted, and Harvey rushed to her aid. He had reached her side when something struck him—something that was without pain or shock of any kind, yet the sunlight was blotted out to black darkness in which rained a shower of sparks, as though every star in the heavens had fallen. Then chaos fell around him.

CHAPTER XXVII

SOME EXPLANATIONS

ALTHOUGH Harvey was unconscious for a long time, that unconsciousness by no means meant oblivion. Throughout the whole period, his mind was continually busy with unpleasant things. Events on Paradise Island had crowded so close on one another's heels as to furnish materials for a fevered brain to feed on for a long time without repeating. At times, he saw Anita struggling with Anson, he striving with all his soul to reach them, and, with that singular aggravation of nightmare, remaining rooted to the spot. Again, he was running through the sand on missions where haste was imperative. He must warn somebody of something, and the sand displayed the mechanical properties of a treadmill. Or, he was smothering in the *Albicore*, held fast by the leering, rummy mate of the *Kestrel*, while Anita called to him from without in tones of anguish.

There was, in fact, an infinite variety to these assorted nightmares, but through them all he saw watching, ever watching, with its evil, menacing smile, the malign, distorted face of Doctor Marvin. Sometimes it came close to his and he lived again the incident of his racked arms and cried aloud in agony. That was when some one was bandaging his wounded shoulder.

Then there came a time when he began to have periods of consciousness, when he would lie studying, in perplexity, the equipment of a vessel's cabin that was entirely unfamiliar to him. He would try to talk, but his tongue seemed to share the overpowering lassitude of the rest of his body and would not respond. And it was seldom, when these periods came, that he was alone. Anita was there beside him to put a cool hand on his forehead or a glass of water to his lips. But she would never talk, except a few whispered words. This was very annoying and he tried, with his refractory tongue, to explain that there were a number of things he wished to be informed about at once.

Then these wakeful periods grew longer, and little by little his tongue began to grow tractable and utter words. He understood that he had been weak and ill as he never had in his life before—much more so than seemed in keeping with a bullet-wound in the shoulder. That was one of the things he wanted to ask about. He never saw Englehart, but he could hear great things stirring on deck and always a steady, rhythmic sound like the piston-stroke of an engine that would, when he had listened a while, invariably put him to sleep. Anita spoke very seldom, usually to admonish him to lie quiet and not try to talk. Had he been in a hospital with a specific illness, he would have obeyed meekly, but it was hard with so many puzzles irritating him continually.

HE HAD been ill about four weeks when, having fallen asleep at three the afternoon before, he awoke at about nine o'clock in the morning. A

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perfectly round patch of sunlight, like a miniature sun, formed by the port-hole over his head, was dancing up and down on the opposite wall. He felt amazingly strong and refreshed. He moved his arms and legs. They responded easily and he felt no pain whatever. Anita was sitting beside him, reading. She had not yet seen that he was awake.

"Good morning, Nita!" he called, in as loud a voice as he could muster.

The book flew from her hands and she bounced out of her chair.

"Harvey!" she cried, "my goodness, how you frightened me!"

"Huh!" said he; "that's nothing. I can yell twice as loud as that!"

"Don't try, for heaven's sake!" She came and smoothed his forehead. "Oh, boy, you're getting well! I'm so glad!" There was a quiver in her voice and she laid her head on the pillow beside his.

Harvey looked up to see Englehart blowing through his pipe-stem and twinkling at him in the doorway.

"Well, son, how goes it?" he asked.

"Bully!" said Harvey. "With a fair handicap, I could beat you in a foot-race."

Carncross appeared with his kindly, weather-beaten grin.

"Glad you're coming round, lad," said he.

"Come in here, you fellows, and sit down. There's a lot I want to ask about."

"All right, but you'd better get it by spells, a little at a time."

"You mustn't talk too much, Harvey," said Anita.

"I won't. I'll just ask questions and you fellows can answer. How long have I been laid up?"

"Four weeks."

"What! Do you mean to say a bullet in the shoulder will put a fellow's lights out for four weeks?"

Carncross and Englehart were exchanging amused glances.

"Man," said Englehart, "that was bad enough. That arm won't be much use to you for six months at least. But that wasn't the worst."

"Well, get on. Break the news. I can bear it."

"Marvin wasn't dead. He had one last kick left, and he raised up and shot you in the back. My shot finished him, but it was too late. His bullet just missed your spine and ranged around for'ard where we could feel it under the skin. Jim here cut it out with a razor. Jim's been surgeon-in-chief and everything else aboard here lately. Since his arm got well he's been down in the diving-suit probing around every day, and he's swabbed you out and filled you with all the poison in the medicine chest. You owe a lot to Jim."

Carncross flushed and looked embarrassed but none the less pleased. "That's all right, but here's the real doctor." He pointed to Anita. "She's the one that's pulled you through, my lad."

"I haven't suffered for lack of care, that's evident. Jim, if you're the doctor, what does the doctor say about allowing me a cigarette?"

At this appeal for professional advice, Jim looked startled.

"Damfino," said he. "You're pretty tough. I guess it won't hurt you."

Anita found a cigarette and lit it for him.

"Thanks, Jim, you're the real thing as a doctor. What's that steam-engine affair I hear going all day long?"

"Air-pump. We're right over the wreck and Jim will be snaking out that chest in a day or two."

"I suppose this is the *Kestrel*. Now go back and tell me that part of it, Billy."

"No, sir. This is *not* the *Kestrel*. Emphatically not! The *Kestrel* has disappeared, probably lost at sea with all hands. This is the schooner *Hihimanu*, William Englehart, master; James Carncross, mate and chief-cook-and-bottle-washer; and H. Winthrop, part owner and supercargo."

HARVEY looked his astonishment and Englehart chuckled. "Never mind. I'll tell you about that later. Here's about the *Kestrel*. The only way to beat the other man is to anticipate what he's going to do. It was easy to guess that when we didn't scare at Anson's artillery practise and vamose, he would come at us with boats after dark. It was easy to guess, too, that he'd take the inside course, near shore, because it's the proper thing to do. No one wants to poke around the edge of a reef at night and Paul was too chuckle-headed to do anything original or out of the ordinary.

"Well, we couldn't fight him—hadn't a chance—so I intended to cut around outside when there were only a couple of men on

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watch on the *Kestrel* and make a fair exchange of ships. I didn't, of course, but that's what I did the second time and that time it went through. Then we ran for it. We were delayed some because we sent a boat ashore for you, thinking you might be somewhere on the beach, but you weren't to be found. We slipped our cable and nosed out of the channel, and that's no child's play at night, either. Then, around on the windward side, I dropped off in a boat with all hands, except Jim and two of the boys, and we came ashore, heeled with some of Anson's own guns. Jim worked the *Kestrel* up to windward—she's a sweet craft and sails like a witch—and held off and on. Of course, Anson never suspected that we weren't all on board."

"But, Billy, how did you know they were going to pull that off the second time? We were all under a sort of treaty. They had the chart and all the best of it."

"Because I had more than one string to my bow. Wait, I'll show you something."

He left the cabin for a minute and rereturned, followed by a handsome, smiling young Kanaka. "Ever see this boy before?"

Harvey was not sure. There was something familiar in the dark-eyed youth, and yet——

"Why, yes—no—if he only had a piece of ivory in his nose——"

"You've guessed near enough. That's all, Taipio!"

The Kanaka vanished.

"That boy was the only Kanaka on Anson's schooner. He's the brother of my boy who was shot and escaped with him from the wreck. Marvin got the wreck story out of him by the same sort of dislocation stunt he worked on you, and between that and their killing his brother, he hadn't much love for Anson or Marvin. I've known the boy for years and he's sailed with me more than once. So, when he heard about this night-work of Anson's, he slid overboard and swam over to the *Albicore*. Good thing it was for us, too. I wouldn't have guessed it that time."

"One more question, Billy. Why did you set fire to the *Albicore?*"

"Because I didn't intend making a halfway job of it. When we had Anson's ship, what was the use of leaving one for him? Why, he might have run away in her."

Minnie came in with some broth and the two men rose to go.

"But suppose," said Harvey, "you'd missed fire with the *Kestrel?*"

"I didn't intend to miss fire, my son. I told you something to that effect that night!"

He turned in the doorway, tapping his pipe on his palm. "There's only one thing that galls me," said he, thoughtfully, "and that is: what in Sam Hill ever became of Ben Pratt?"

"Ha, I've got you there, Billy! Come in after I've had a snooze and I'll tell you about it."

When Harvey woke, toward evening, the first thing he asked for was a cigarette, the second, his clothes. He wanted to dress and go on deck at once. The first request Anita granted, the second she firmly refused.

Englehart came in while the argument was in progress and looked him over critically.

"I guess we can get him on deck in a day or two, can't we, Anita? Jim's got down to the chest."

"It's as good as settled," said Harvey. "The deck for mine to-morrow. And speaking of that chest, Billy—hang the sordid side of it, but I've been thinking——"

Billy looked at Anita and solemnly winked.

"Why, about that chest, to be sure. We've had several little business talks of late and finally got it settled. You see, Jim and I held out for our share by right of discovery and salvage, claiming a partnership of three, but Anita wouldn't have it, so, at her request, we had to sign a little partnership agreement and it's all waiting for your signature, too."

"Yes," said Anita, "and Captain Englehart forgets to say that he and Mr. Carncross came to me and insisted on forfeiting all right, title and interest in whatever treasure there is, absolutely in my favor. They said it was to be a—a——"

"— a wedding present," put in Englehart, with a dry chuckle.

Anita blushed and looked at Harvey shyly.

"Yes," she said, softly, "that's what they said, a—a wedding present, and I positively refused to have anything to do with it whatever unless we could be four partners with equal shares, and I made them sign a paper, so there'd be no argument afterward."

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"Regular round robin," said Englehart, "she's strong on details."

He came forward and laid his hand kindly on Anita's shoulder.

"Son, I want to tell you something. This young lady and I are chums. And if I live a thousand years, I'll never square myself in my own mind for the wrong I did her before I'd ever clapped eyes on her. She seems fond of you, strange to say, for you're a tough character, and if you ask me I'd say you were a darned sight luckier than you deserve. Now tell me about Ben Pratt."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE CHEST

HARVEY sat on deck in a steamer-chair. There were luxuries of that kind aboard which the *Albicore* had never known. The crew had come up, one by one, and greeted him, rather sheepishly, except Nolan, who frankly shook hands, an honest look of pleasure in his eyes.

"Boss," said he, "I'm glad to see you round again. I sure am."

"Thanks, Nolan! What do you think of your cruise, as far as you've got?"

"Boss, I ain't had so much fun since the teamsters' riots in 'Frisco."

The face of the lagoon was sparkling in the sun. Out on the edges of the reef, the great combers rolled lazily, the wind whipping off the foam that surmounted a thin edge of translucent green. The birds, once more at peace, were settled on their nests or were about their business of catching fish. On shore nine men sat round a fire near by, cooking a meal. They were the survivors of the *Kestrel's* crew. Two men on a scaffolding were painting the schooner black and two more in the bows were hacking off some ornamental scroll-work.

"You see," said Englehart, "we can't sail this schooner into any civilized port the way she is. It don't matter a hoot who's in the right between us and Anson, the papers and charter are in his name as master and owner. But the *Kestrel* runs pretty close in lines and tonnage to my schooner, the *Hihimanu*, that I lost up yonder. A coat of black, a little carpenter-work, 'Hihimanu' painted on the stern and the boats, and there we are. You see, I saved my papers when my ship went down, so we're going out of here on the *Hihimanu*. It's more or less of a risk, of course, but we're bound for 'Frisco, where my schooner hasn't been for years, and I'll take a chance with the customs people.

"The only bother about the business is those ruffians yonder," he went on, after a thoughtful pause. "For two cents I'd leave the beggars here, with plenty of grub and some money to fight over among themselves, and send some one else to take them off, but Anita won't stand for that. The only man we've kept by us is Chong, the cook. We needed him mighty bad, and he's safe enough. These other fellows we'll have to take along and drop off at the different islands, one by one. I'll see that every one goes ashore with money in his pocket and enough square-face under his belt to make any yarn he tells sound fishy, but it will waste a lot of valuable time."

They were watching the water, where a continuous trail of bubbles showed that Carncross was busy below. A crane had been rigged over the side, from which depended a rope that shook and wriggled as though alive.

PRESENTLY there was a tug at the life-line and a moment later the head of a goggle-eyed monster bobbed up alongside and Carncross climbed slowly up the ladder to the deck. When they had removed his helmet they saw that his eyes were sparkling, his whole face radiant with success.

"Well," said he, as he rid himself of the weights and cumbersome diving-dress. "She's fast. All there is to do now is haul her up. Lucky thing she wasn't buried in sand, as we thought. It would have taken a year to dig her out, if it could have been done at all. She's lying in a patch of ooze with weeds thirty feet long all over and around her, and as empty as a shell. All I had to do was bust into her with an ax and shovel a few tons of truck out of her insides. Now, men, ready with that line! All together, now, haul away!"

The men tailed on to the tackle, hauling with a will, and soon the heavy burden at the end of the line came to the surface and was swung inboard to the deck. It was a large chest, heavily shod with iron and elaborate scrolls. It had three locks of complicated pattern, and was so heavy that

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it took four men to carry it below and deposit it on the table in the cabin.

"Now, Jim," said Englehart, "you're the jack-of-all-trades; get to work as a safe-blower, and worry her open."

But this promised many difficulties. A chest of that kind is not made to be opened easily and Jim scratched his head dubiously as he overhauled the carpenter's kit. He worked for several hours with much perspiration and profanity, but without result. Filing accomplished nothing and he broke every hack-saw blade in the outfit before he gave up this form of attack. At last, however, he managed to drive the point of a small crow-bar under the lid and heaved on it with all the muscle of his broad shoulders. To his surprise, it gave slightly.

"Hello!" he cried, "what's this? Why, only one of these dog-gone locks is fastened. It's the one on the other end. We'll have her open before you can say Methusalem!"

He drove wedges into the crack, prying it apart till he could insert a larger bar, and then, with a tremendous heave, snapped the lock and the heavy lid flew open. The four partners gathered round this hard-won prize and delved into it, all except Englehart in a state of wild excitement. This was the reward for all the grim struggle on Paradise Island.

THE chest was not water-proof, and though the free water had leaked out between the crevices as it had stood on end on the deck, everything within was saturated. On the very top was a canvas bag of gold coin. A subsequent count showed the amount to be a trifle less than three thousand dollars. Next to this was a packet protected with a cover of oilskin. It was an old book, full of loose papers and bound about with a strand of coconut fiber. It proved to be the log of Corrigan's old schooner of the wrecker's auction, and was laid aside. Then came a suit of clothes, new and of excellent texture, but quite ruined. Underneath were several remarkably ornate and flashy waistcoats, all with buttons of diamonds or huge pearls. It was evident that waistcoats had been a hobby of the late King. There was more clothing; a dress suit with a crush hat, several suits of underwear of fine Chinese silk, a bolt of pongee, and in the bottom a large assortment of curios of considerable value.

A sandalwood box contained a handful of pearls and several loose diamonds, some of them uncut. There were Malay krises and bolos from the Philippines, the half of a huge pearl-shell, beautifully carved and polished, ivory ornaments, some small, exquisite pieces of cloisonné in velvet-lined cases, and a heavy necklace of human teeth. That was all.

The partners stared at each other. Then Anita burst into a wild, uncontrollable fit of laughter, in which the others presently joined. They laughed till the cabin rang with it and then, on a sudden, were all struck sober. The thought of the tragedies centered on the chest and its contents fell upon them like a pall.

"Jim," said Englehart, "you've got the wrong box. Go down and get the right one. This was Corrigan's trunk, not the treasury."

"There's no other chest there," said Jim, positively. "I've ransacked that cabin till I know every inch of it by heart. There ain't nothin' left even faintly resemblin' a chest. I've busted open everything else."

He began idly exploring the pockets of the clothing, while Englehart retired to his room and threw himself on the bunk to scan, with a sailor's interest, the old log-book. Ten minutes later there was a yell from the room and Billy appeared a moment later in the main cabin.

"Good people, I have it!" said he, striving to be calm. "By gracious, I have it! And who'd have thought it? What do you suppose the old son-of-a-gun—I *beg* your pardon, Anita—what do you think he did? Well, just cast your eye over that!"

He slapped the log-book down at an open page and indicated two entries. The book was nearly filled with writing and it appeared that Corrigan, after having laid up his old schooner and settled down ashore, had used the log as a sort of diary in which to record important events of the kingdom. Many of the entries were in a light, conversational style quite out of keeping with the subject. For instance:

> May 9, 188–. They brought in this day one Tamatani, a chief who has been preaching insurrection back in the hills. Fine old buck. Wonderfully tattooed. Had him shot.

But the entries of thrilling interest were the two last in the book. The dates were two weeks apart. The first read:

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———, Left Motuahi this day forever. Have chest containing treasure, consisting of over 3,000 pearls of highest grade, U. S. Gold Coin, Treasury notes and Calif. Bonds. Inventory of same elsewhere among papers.

Bade family and chiefs farewell with regret. Am expected to return in three or four months. I shall not do so. Malie will make a good king, I think.

And the last:

———, This day fell in with Pac. Nav. Co. liner *Empress of Manchuria*. Attracted her attention by hoisting flag, union down, for distress signal. Went aboard myself and Captain swore like a pirate when he learned why I'd stopped him in mid-ocean. Said he carried mail and had mind to clap me in irons a prisoner for causing delay. When I told him the figure he changed his tune. Money talks and if it's big enough, anybody in the world will listen. Gave him two thousand dollars to cover expenses for his company, such as lost time, freight charges, etc., and a thousand for himself.

Then we transshipped the treasure-chest from schooner to the *Empress*, same to be deposited in Safe Dep. vault of 14th Nat'l Cal. Bank, subject to my order.

Shall sleep easy once more, as chest was killing me with worry. Can take a drink now with a clear conscience. Let them come. What do I care now whether any of these pirates got wind of it or not? Two fellows in particular I was scared of: the man they call Dirty Dick and Paul Anson; both Britishers and bad men. Let them come. I can sleep easy.

"Here," said Englehart, "is the receipt for a sealed chest, value of contents unknown, signed by the Captain and Chief Officer of the *Empress of Manchuria*, and another for two thousand dollars gold, expense and charges. And here, too, is the inventory of that treasure. Take a good look at it; it will make your mouths water! And that's what we've been fighting and burning ships about! Anita, who is Corrigan's heir, is the only one who can lay hands on the stuff, after all. Winthrop, you're a fool for luck! Jim, hunt up something to drink. I need a stimulant. And be ready to get under way at day-break!"

THE schooner *Kestrel*, now the *Hihimanu*, was sliding over the long seas, a day out from Apemama, in the Gilberts, where the last of Anson's men had been left ashore, a willing recruit to the small, dissolute colony of the beach. Anita and Harvey stood at the rail, watching a school of porpoises rollicking by. They had shaken off the depressing influence of Paradise Island, though there were things so indelibly written in their memories that they were never to be forgotten or recalled without a shudder. Harvey was gaining strength every day, thanks to what Englehart called "an indestructible constitution," but just now there was a slight shadow on his face.

"What's troubling you, dear?" asked Anita, "you look melancholy."

"Why," said Harvey, "I was just thinking. The confounded cigarettes are all out and the Captain says it's three weeks run to Honolulu!"

Englehart came from below and stood beside them. "Well, young folks, we've got a clear run of open water. The next land you'll see will be the Island of Oahu. I suppose you're going to worry and fuss all the voyage, in a hurry to get a look at King Corrigan's treasure."

"Billy," said Harvey: "I'm ashamed of you—positively. Why, you've had King Corrigan's treasure under your eyes for weeks and yet you speak of looking forward to seeing it—her, I should say. Billy if *you* want to, you can wallow in pearls and gold pieces till you've had enough. *I've* got the *real* treasure of King Corrigan. This is her."

And, with this ungrammatical period, he took Anita's cheeks in his hands and shamelessly kissed her.

Billy's eyes twinkled. "I guess you're right, my son," said he.

THE END.

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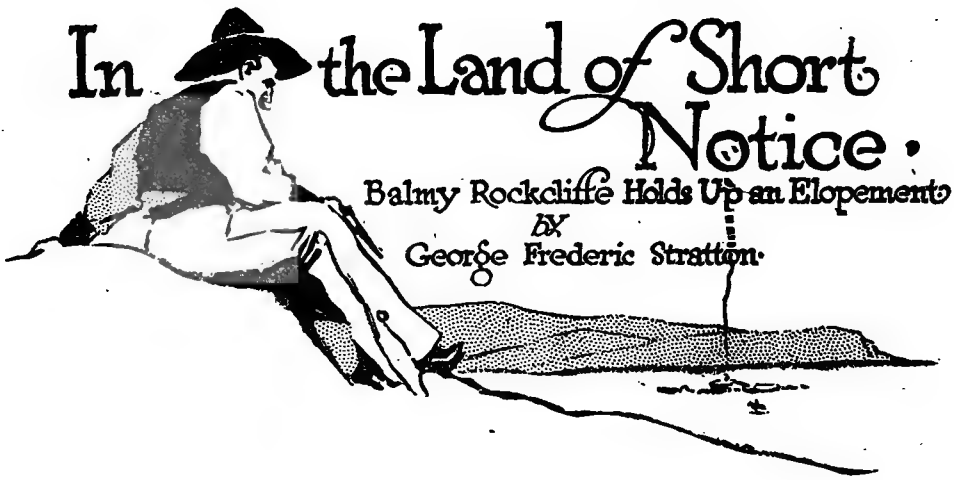
In the Land of Short Notice

Balmy Rockcliffe Holds Up an Elopement

by George Frederic Stratton



BALMY stooped to pick up the bird he had just shot, and as his fingers grasped it they caught in a curiously coated wire, concealed in the weedy brush. A vigorous pull failed to expose either end.

He gave a low whistle of surprise. No man, he thought, knew better than himself the trails and wild places of Seven Troughs Canyon. Not the first step of civilization had come into it, and yet, here was an insulated wire, cunningly and secretly drawn through the brush and leading from—where to where?

He glanced keenly about, then pushed the wire back into the grass, dropped down near it and, as he smoked, thought of the enigma. Who ran that wire, and why?

There was not a mine within fifty miles, nor any other reason for that conductor. There was no house within ten miles, except the Bar B Ranch. That was at the mouth of the canyon, almost within gunshot; but Balmy knew that Dyke Bentler abhorred modern innovations as much as he abhorred sheepmen.

He went back to the wire and cautiously and very deftly traced it. At some points where it led down the bare scarred face of some great boulder, it was quite visible to a searching eye, but for most of the way it was well concealed, and only his quick decision that it would surely have been led to where it was going in as straight a line as possible, enabled him to follow it without feeling almost every yard of it.

Suddenly he slipped behind a rock and peered cautiously ahead. Across a scrub-cedar-covered ravine was a girl, crouching by the trunk of an enormous cottonwood, that stood on the line of the wire. Balmy stealthily crept down into the ravine and up the opposite slope; then with a gasp, he muttered,

"It's Roby Bentler! What in Socorro is she doing to that tree?"

The girl was slipping a strip of bark back into place. Picking up her Winchester, she strode off, threading her way among huge rocks and tangled brush so confidently and so masterfully as to bring a sparkling gleam of admiration into Balmy's eyes. He watched her make her way down the narrow trail and turn the bend which led to the canyon-mouth. Then he crawled over to the big cottonwood and, after close examination, released the strip of rough bark, exposing a hollow in which was a pair of telegraph instruments connected to the wire he had been tracing.

IT WAS no idle curiosity that led Balmy to trace that wire back and find its further connection, for he was—as he had expressed it to a comrade—on a short vacation. An unusually daring exploit with the Rawhide stage had been followed by an offer of two thousand dollars for Balmy's arrest, and that adventurous and somewhat unprincipled divider of wealth had plunged into the Wasatch Mountains, working through their most inaccessible parts and settling down for two or three weeks' seclusion just off the

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line of the secluded Seven Troughs Canyon.

And now, that wire, even if it seemed to be Roby Bentler's private line, carried a full current of suspicion and apprehension, for Balmy estimated telegraph and telephone as the greatest antagonists of his profession.

He recrossed the ravine, picked up the wire and traced it to its other connection; a short run from where the telegraph-line from the desert-town of Gower's Chance to the mining-town of Ventura, was slung on its lonely poles. Balmy had had some early experience in telegraph manipulation and his eyes now glinted with admiration at the ingenious and secret cut-in.

"Might pass a dozen inspectors without discovery!" he grinned, "unless they were looking for just that. The fellow that did it was some——" Then, after a pause, he slapped his thigh vigorously, and exclaimed, "Lansford, or I miss my guess! And if it is, the cards are stacked! Guess I'll sit in on this game."

The next morning, when the agent of the tank-station at Lost Creek—twenty miles west—opened the board shack which was dignified into a ticket-office, he found that some night visitor had disconnected his instruments and sequestered them. He wrote his report to headquarters, handed it to the conductor of the first train which passed, then, placing his feet where the instruments should have been, he smoked cigarettes continuously, congratulating himself on there being no key to pound that day.

Balmy took those instruments to the hidden wire which had aroused his curiosity and, about midway between the two extremities of the line, he connected them in; or, as he gaily chuckled, he "tapped the tap."

THROUGH that day he stealthily watched the big cottonwood where Roby's instruments were and, late in the afternoon, he saw her lithe figure threading the rocky trail. He slipped back through the cedar brush to his own instruments, arriving in time to catch the messages on his sounder.

Can't it be delayed, Billy? I'd rather wait.

Must be to-night. Every moment risk now. Your father getting suspicious. Has set Bud Oakley to watch me. To-night, my girl, at seven. Slip out after supper. We'll get two hours start. Plenty.

If can't be helped, Billy, I will. But if we are overtaken——

Have no fear. Got everything so fixed will be no mishap. In Boisé to-morrow. Marry, then I will get after Balmy.

Is it sure, Billy? I'm so afraid.

Sure. I know just where Balmy is. That two thousand dollars is ours, Roby. But got to get after him at once. Need two good horses. Can you get that money?

Yes.

Good. Seven sharp, my girl.

The sounder ceased. Balmy rose from where he had squatted beside the instruments and grinningly quoted the barker of a side-show:

"Marvelous! Marvelous!! From the Old World! The Great and Only Lansford. The Wonderful Wire-Wizard of the Wild and Woolly. Also and likewise, the most Astounding, Stupendous, Unconquerable and Unapproachable Eloper of this Terrestrial Sphere on which we Move and Live and Have our Beans."

Then he gravely and conjecturingly quoted from the sounder:

"'To-night, my girl, at seven.' But where?"

II

OUT on the gray stretch of parched prairie which formed the two-thousand-acre door-yard of the Bar B Ranch, Roby rode her pony on an apparently purposeless canter. Up to the corral-bars she came with a dash, wheeling the pony on its hind legs and dashing off on another angle. In a heavy arm-chair on the wide rough porch, her father—Dyke Bentler, grim, gray and watchful—lolled, smoking. From the doorway, her mother, dish-towel in hand, often glanced proudly at the girl and more than once the girl's hand started prettily from her lips in a motion that swung out vigorously toward her mother. Presently, on one of her wild dashes, the girl disappeared round Doghole Rock and was, for the time, lost to view.

A mile away, in the entrance of the Seven Troughs Canyon, Balmy watched, a small glass at his eyes, which hid the fine admiration in those eyes at the splendid riding.

As Roby dashed around Doghole Rock, Balmy muttered, "That settles it. I'm bettin'. Going north."

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Striding into a clump of cottonwoods, he unroped his mare and, followed by the horse, as a well-trained dog would follow, he groped, slipped and plunged along the dry bed of a small cross-gulch for several minutes, until he could strike on the foot-hills trail, out of sight of the ranch. Then, with one spring, he was on the saddle, settling into it at the same instant that the mare plunged into the long-striding, distance-annihilating gallop for which Balmy loved her.

One more sharp turn on the trail and he saw the girl ahead, loping easily. He glanced at his watch. Six forty-five.

"Must be close to the place," he muttered, as he drew the mare down to a walk, glancing keenly at the great outlying boulders, in readiness for instant cover, if necessary.

Suddenly, he threw himself along the near side of the mare, his right leg hugging the cantle, and slipped the reins over her head. The mare at once nosed into a clump of wild lettuce.

So neatly was it done that Roby—who had halted, and turned in her saddle to glance back—did not, at that distance, see that the mare was saddled and mounted; and she murmured, "Old Reddy's loose again."

Then, after a sharp scrutiny of the trail she had just come over, she turned into a small narrow gulch and disappeared.

Balmy worked up closer, reaching a great jutting spur of rock which concealed him from the trail. There he waited. At that moment he would have given a hundred dollars to have been two hundred feet north of that gulch instead of two hundred feet south of it, for he knew that it was the rendezvous of the girl and Lansford and that, when they rode out, it would be away from him, and every principle of true banditism rebelled against riding *after* a man. To *face* him, and do it suddenly, was the simple, all-embracing creed.

So impatient did he become at this, so determined not to give Lansford—who was no tenderfoot—any undue advantage, that he pushed the mare again on the trail, trusting, with but small measure of hope, to a sparse growth of brush to conceal him.

AGAIN he waited. But not for long! He heard the rattle of loose stones as their horses started from the gulch. As the first nose appeared among the irregular boulders which lay about the entrance, a touch of his spur put the mare at that entrance and Balmy's voice, not loud but terribly earnest, growled,

"Hands up!"

Backed as the command was by two unmistakably aimed revolvers, hesitation was folly. Lansford was experienced and his hands went up as he gasped,

"Balmy Rockcliffe, by ——!"

Balmy glanced at the shrinking girl, touched the rim of his hat with one gun and smilingly said,

"Sorry to butt in just now, Miss Bentler, but I've a trifle of business with Mr. Lansford here."

"Cut it short, Rockcliffe!" sneered the operator. "I know what you're after. Go ahead, and then ride away. We're in a hurry!"

"Drop your gun down there!" commanded Balmy. "Very careful, Lansford! Ve-ry careful! That's it! Now, dismount!"

As the operator obeyed, Balmy edged his mare alongside the other man's horse and, with a sharp outward kick, drove a spur into the animal's side. One rearing plunge, and it went down the trail in a cloud of alkali 'dobe.

"Now, Lansford!" grinned Balmy, "I know what this meeting with Miss Bentler means and what's to follow, unless she sees fit to return home. Listen! I'm going to reel off a small chapter of your life, and I'll tell it truthful. If I don't, you may interrupt me and contradict; but if you contradict the truth, I'll put you in shape that you'll have to be carried out of here, instead of getting the chance to walk out.

"I knew this man in Boisé, Miss Bentler, some years ago. He was married then and he's married now. His wife is up there now, earning the living for herself and two little ones by washing for Boisé miners!"

He glared sternly at Lansford, watching for contradiction, but none came. Balmy grinned, and went on,

"I saw a good deal of him in Boisé, and in Cheyenne and Omaha, for I was keeping some bad company myself then—I pretty much always do! And wherever there was bad company you'd find Lansford! Now he's made you understand that the first stage of your trip was to be to Boisé—and he lied! He'd no more dare to go into Boisé than into the Beehive Geyser in the Yellowstone. The results would be pretty

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much the same, only more so. He'll do with you as he did with a Pocatello girl—run you away from your folks and, as soon as he gets tired of you, or has lost your money on two pair, seven-high, he'll turn you off to leg your way back home—or, more likely, do worse with you."

"That's piled up enough!" sneered Lansford. "I'm not denying anything. You've got the cards, own the table, the room it's in and the doorkeeper. Switch off now, and let me follow my horse!"

"Look at him!" warned Balmy. "He knows I'm a man of my word. If I was telling lies, he'd contradict me in a moment, for he's got sand; plenty of it! But there's no contradiction coming. Look at him!"

LANSFORD, normally, was a strikingly handsome man to a young and inexperienced girl. To men who had met men, the signs of his character were instantly unmistakable. Now they were so accented by his rage and the defeat of his rather elaborate plans for thwarting Roby's father—the most determined and vindictive rancher in the Wasatch Valley—that, as the girl looked at him, he recoiled with alarm and horror.

"He's commenced with you," Balmy continued with intense sternness, "by persuading you to rob your father to furnish funds for this little excursion. Isn't that correct, Miss Bentler?"

The girl flushed deeply. There was a moment's fierce struggle with herself; then her face—pretty before, but now beautiful from strong emotion—filled with disgust, scorn and contrition.

"He told me," she gasped, "that you were hiding near Boisé; that he knew exactly where to get you and would get that reward. He also said that he had good property in Boisé, on which he could raise money the moment we got there, and we would then return what I—er—I borrowed from my father."

"All he owns in Boisé, or ever did," smiled Balmy, "is his wife and children, and debts enough to buy a ranch, if he could cash 'em again. Now, about that money you brought here. Has *he* got it, or *you?*"

"*He* has!"

Balmy's eyes fastened on Lansford. His right hand made the usual impressive warning oscillation of his revolver. His left arm slowly stretched out and the index-finger pointed to the ground. The operator understood and slowly, very slowly, his hand crept into his shirt-bosom, withdrew with the package, and the fingers unclasped.

"Pick it up again now," commanded Balmy, "and hand it to me." He was still on his mare.

Lansford obeyed. Balmy opened the package and counted the money, then looked enquiringly at the girl and asked,

"Six hundred dollars. Is that right, Miss Bentler?"

She nodded. Balmy urged his mare close to her and handed her the package. Then, turning to Lansford, he exclaimed,

"That's all! Git!"

The man's eyes flashed with rage and vindictiveness, but he said nothing. He strode out on the trail and started north, toward Ventura, while Balmy, again touching his hat, said to the girl,

"I'll ride back toward home with you part way, Miss Bentler. You've not lost much time on this trip, and as far as I'm concerned, no one will ever know that you'd planned anything but a little pony exercise."

SHE made no reply. For a short distance, they rode; Balmy's keen glances taking in every rod of the trail behind as well as ahead of them, for he knew that in that country every man was his enemy. As he once glanced behind, he saw Lansford turn back and dash into the gulch, and a knowing grin came to his features as he muttered to himself,

"Just as I figured!"

Then he turned to the girl.

"You'll be safe now, Miss Bentler, and I'll leave you. There'll sure be too good a welcome for me if I get near your father's ranch, but not of the brand that suits. Good-by!"

The girl swayed a little in her saddle.

"Just a moment, Mr.—er—Rockcliffe. You—you've saved me! I know it now; and I want to thank you, I do! I sure do! But I don't know how. If it had all happened, I should never have seen my father or my mother again. Never! You've roped me out of a grave."

Balmy was close alongside. He picked up her whip-hand, pressed his lips to it, gazed deeply into her pathetically misty

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eyes for a moment, then, hat in hand, wheeled into an opening in the hills and rode away.

In five minutes, he stopped his horse, roped it securely and climbed like a mountain-sheep up the sides of the small ravine into which he had ridden. He gained the summit and, lying flat amid the brush, scanned the country. A few moments later he smiled expansively, for he caught sight of Lansford scrambling with more haste than caution among the rocks. He was heading for the big cottonwood tree and Balmy delightedly muttered,

"He's figuring on that two-thousand-dollar reward to make good the six hundred I made him cough up."

THEN he slipped down into the cedar-grown gulch, crossed it, scrambled up the other side and reached his concealed instruments just in time to cut-out Ventura and Gower's Chance, and cut-in his own instruments.

His sounder clicked, "*Dick*," and he knew that Lansford was at the big cottonwood. Balmy answered,

"*O. K.*"

"*This is Lansford*," came on the sounder. "*Take rush message for Sheriff Berkhole.*"

Again Balmy clicked "*O. K.*," and again on his sounder he caught:

"*Balmy Rockcliffe in the Wasatch Mountains. Up Seven Troughs Canyon. Know him well. Have just left him. Stole my horse. Send men Gower's Chance trail. Also posse to Canyon. Also cover southwest pass. Get him sure.*"

Balmy's hand shook so with his unrepressed merriment that he could hardly work his key. He sent:

"*Wait. Sheriff outside the office. Will call him in.*"

Then, after a proper interval, he sent:

"*Sheriff says O. K. Will cover as you say. Where are you?*"

Lansford replied,

"*On the trail. Had instrument with me. Tapped wire to save time.*"

With a wonderfully wicked chuckle, Balmy sent:

"*Lansford, sheriff from Boisé here looking for you. Man with him named Stifling. Told them you'd gone hills, day's shooting. They are just leaving here on horses down the trail. Know them?*"

Lansford's only response was the sharp, decisive "*All through*" signal. Balmy disconnected his instruments and cut a dozen feet off the wires, to prevent any quick re-connection. Then he rolled and lit a cigarette. As the tiny jets of smoke darted from his nostrils, his eyes lit up with intense delight and satisfaction.

"I'm betting," he howled unrestrainedly, "that Sheriff Berkhole'll be some older before he gets his message. Likewise an' also, I'm betting big that the Only Lansford isn't losing any time, so you'd notice it, in putting big chunks of landscape between himself and the good old Gower's Chance trail. I've saved him from that grizzly Dyke Bentler, for which I'm sure regretful, but I've put him away from the girl. She's safe now! All the same, it seems some friv'lous for me to be playing the Good Samaritan act. Won't I ever be a real Bad Man?"

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James Ward Rogers

Uncrowned King.

The Tragic End of the Famous American Ivory Poacher.

by W. Robert Foran

EVERY one will remember the dramatic story, recently given to the world through the daily press, of the death of James Ward Rogers, the American elephant-poacher, in the Congo. The name Rogers probably conveyed nothing to many millions all over the world until the story of his tragic end was published broadcast. Yet to many who have traveled in Stanley's "Darkest Africa"—the territory which witnessed the truly remarkable end of an adventurous career—the details of the dramatic chase through the jungles and its still more dramatic conclusion will not be a mere pipe-dream.

There must be many others in America besides myself who have been through this section of Central Africa and to whom Rogers was known personally. And to us the story brings regrets, for Rogers was a fine type of man, even though his latter days were spent in outlawry and defiance of lawfully constituted authority.

In order that the causes which led up to the tragedy may be better understood, it is necessary to touch lightly upon history and political facts. Many may recall that the British government leased the strip of the Congo territory known as the Lado Enclave—a long strip stretching along the banks of the Nile from the southernmost extremity of Lake Albert to Kiro, on the edge of Sudan—to the late King Leopold of the Belgians, for the duration of his lifetime. On his death, it passed back into British hands and, incidentally, under the control of the Sudan officials.

THE IVORY-POACHERS' PARADISE

PRIOR to this—that is to say, under Leopold's rule—the Lado Enclave was the happy hunting-ground of a band of British and foreign ivory-poachers. The Belgian administration of the Lado was a mere farce. Officials were few and far between and the natives did as they willed, without fear of let or hindrance. It must be remembered, however, that if any of the poachers were caught red-handed with the poached ivory, they were sent to the Belgian Congo capital, Leopoldsville, on the Congo River, to undergo ten years' hard labor in a chain-gang.

This little pleasantry of punishment was the worst imaginable. They were chained round the neck and fastened to a long string of the worst native malefactors. Their legs were riveted into chains and round their middles were other heavy chains, supporting the enormous leg-irons. All day these poor wretches worked in the forests or in the open, under a blazing sun, goaded on to further labor by the extreme brutalities of their hard-hearted guards.

White man and negro were treated alike. No favors were shown to any of them. Their terrible day's work completed, they were driven like so many sheep into a filthy prison and allowed to get what little rest they could before beginning the next day's toil. Mosquitos bit them, snakes crawled over them, flies irritated them, and their food was of the worst. For couch, they had but the hard earth floor of their prison, and always the chains and iron

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rings ate into their flesh. Prisoners do not long survive such treatment in such a climate.

But few of the white poachers were ever caught. The few who had the misfortune to be captured generally managed to escape from their guards before they reached Leopoldsville. Yet always, over all their heads, was shadowed this living torment of captivity. Many of the readers of ADVENTURE will recall an article on this subject which appeared in the August, 1911, issue of the magazine. The story of Rogers is but the sequel to these facts.

IT MAY be safely stated that the death of Rogers closes the long chapter of lawless elephant poaching in the Congo. For years the Lado Enclave was known as "No Man's Land;" but it is not so now, for the Sudan government assumed control in June, 1910, and set about exterminating the poaching industry. It was made abundantly clear to all ivory-hunters that they would no longer be permitted to poach for elephants. In place of lawlessness there would henceforth be law and order. Most of the poachers with whom I conversed during my journey up the Nile on the trail of Colonel Roosevelt recognized that their day was ended, and they were already preparing to depart to pastures new. Not only would they have the Belgian terrors of captivity to face, but also the strong arm of the Sudan law. It is true that latter would not torture them, yet imprisonment in Khartum would be their lot on being captured. And there are more congenial places than Khartum at which to be imprisoned.

On my arrival at Mongalla, the southernmost post of the Sudan on the Nile in those days, I had the good fortune to meet my old comrade in arms, Captain C. V. Fox of the Egyptian Army, and discussed at length with him the prospects of routing out the ivory-poachers. He assured me then that it was the intention of the Sudan government to blot out the trade, and, as for himself, he was fully determined to see that this intention was no empty one.

At the time I little thought that, a trifle over two years later, Captain Fox would be the central figure with Rogers in one of the most dramatic and exciting stories of real adventure which has ever come out of the Congo, or, for that matter, Africa. But we who know our Africa have learned to be surprised at nothing.

A FIGURE OF MYSTERY

PART of this remarkable story comes to me direct from my old friend Captain Fox and part from other friends in Africa. Captain Fox's story lacks a good many details, for the modesty of the British soldier is reflected throughout his narrative. There are many points you and I would like to have cleared up, but either Fox's modesty or his sense of what is due to a dying man's last request prevent the elucidation of the blank spaces.

For instance, we would like to know who is the Doctor referred to by Rogers and Captain Fox. Maybe we shall never know! Rogers's lips are sealed by death and the lips of Captain Fox are sealed by a dying man's last charge. The "Doctor" must go down to posterity as a figure of mystery, unless the Belgians disclose his name. We know that he was the boon companion of Rogers and we have the latter's statement that he was innocent of poaching. Beyond this we know nothing and probably shall never know anything, for the Belgians have him in their toils and I have already told you what that means.

The closing chapters in Rogers's history are remarkable for the fact that he should have dared to brave the wrath of the Sudan government. It required a temerity of a degree seldom given to any man—for not only did he dare the Sudan officials, but also the Belgians. Mere limitations of international boundaries had no meaning for this poacher. Men who have traveled extensively in Central Africa have learned that the Sudan administration is not at all a joke. Yet, knowing this, Rogers for some time past had been deliberately setting it at defiance. It took a rare degree of courage to face such a situation and carry it to such lengths as Rogers did before he paid the penalty.

A MAN OF THE LOST LEGION

ONE must sympathize with Rogers, even if one disapproves of his breaches of the law. His is a picturesque figure and he died as, no doubt, he would have wished to have died—with his face to the front and shielding his comrade, the mysterious Doctor.

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As I knew the dead poacher, he was a brave man, fearless to a degree, and possessed of superlative energy. One meets men of his caliber all over the world—men who inspired Rudyard Kipling to write his famous "Lost Legion." Yet, brave man and resourceful as Rogers was, he met his match in Captain Fox.

Rogers was an American who, at different times, was a resident of many cities in California. He had spent many years of his life in an unquenchable search after adventure—with a big A—until he found his heart's desire in Central Africa. He joined in the rush to the Klondike in the late nineties and after his return he entirely disappeared until the news came of his death in Africa.

He was a silent, capable man; one born to command and do great things. He should have lived in earlier times, for then his restless spirit would have found an adequate outlet in the pursuit of the life of a paid soldier of fortune. After trying first one thing and then another in Africa, he turned his hand to elephant poaching, and here he found his true element of adventure.

Not only did he risk his life every moment from terrible diseases, thirst, hunger, treachery from the uncivilized hordes of the Congo natives, and ten years' hard labor in a Belgian chain-gang if captured, but he also faced death every time he shot an elephant. No small list of dangers when you come to think of it!

Perhaps we shall never know all that happened to him while he pursued his poaching. We know from what information has been made public that he had amassed a small fortune from his illicitly obtained ivory. We know that he had got the natives of the Lado Enclave under his control so that they did his every bidding and acted as his allies. He established an organized administration over the wild, trackless country and, among these naked savages, who had hitherto known no master, was virtually a king, even if he was an uncrowned monarch. Time after time he evaded capture by Sudan and Belgian officials. And, finally, we know that he eluded a hot pursuit for over six weeks. Yet there must be much more worth hearing, if we could only get at it. Some day his companion—the unknown Doctor—may be in a position to give it to the world. Let us hope so, for it should make as interesting and fascinating reading as the story of how John Boyes became king of the Akikuyu tribe of East Africa.

THE POACHER'S LIFE IN AFRICA

HAVING seen the poachers in real life in the Congo, I can, without difficulty, conjure up a picture of his life.

Entering the Lado Enclave with his white companion, he set to work to make the unruly and hitherto unsubdued natives subservient to his will—and even more than that, for he made them stanch allies. This most difficult task accomplished, he felt in a better position to defy the law and set about the shooting of elephants. On the approach of Government officials the natives would give him ample warning so that he could escape. Then he traveled about the country until he saw a good site for his headquarters, where he could store his ivory, ammunition and supplies.

The next thing to do was to train a band of natives to act as soldiers. This was the least difficult of his many preparations for the war against lawful authority. The native of Africa takes to soldiering as a duck takes to water.

All now being ready, he proceeded to mark down the good herds of elephants in his vicinity. His native spies were trained to bring him early information of the approach of a good herd. No sooner did he get news of some big tuskers than he set forth through the thorn scrub, under a blazing tropical sun, to track them.

Creeping on all-fours through the bushes and fifteen-foot-high grass, he made his way into the center of the herd and selected his bulls. Taking careful aim from not more than twenty paces, and watching the shifting wind so that the elephants would not learn of his presence, he would fire. The herd would stampede at the first alarm and the hunter had to keep cool to escape injury. Always watching for another chance to bring down an elephant, he would follow them up until he had killed off all the best tuskers in the herd. Then would come the cutting up of the elephants and the hewing out of their giant ivory teeth.

All the time he was on the alert, to avoid capture by British or Belgian armed police patrols. Excitement crammed every

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moment of his day and night. His hunting might be aptly likened to the work of a burglar who, knowing a policeman is standing at the door watching him, yet continues his task, trusting to luck to favor his escape with the booty. With death from an elephant's trunk, tusk or foot in front of him, and almost certain imprisonment behind him, Rogers proved that his nerves were made of cast iron by continuing his poaching.

But at last the Sudan Government determined to stand this brazen lawlessness no longer. A messenger was despatched to Rogers warning him to come in and surrender or else, declared the officials, he would not be spared.

His answer was typical of the man:

"If you want me, come and get me."

"DEAD OR ALIVE"

NOW Captain Fox, Inspector of the Mongalla Province in the Sudan, did want Rogers and, moreover, wanted him badly. He accepted the challenge, after first sending word to Rogers that he proposed to bring him into Mongalla, "dead or alive."

Rogers laughed when he read the message. Back came the answer, on the foot of the same official note: "I am waiting. Come and get me."

Captain Fox set forth from Mongalla in pursuit of this daring outlaw with the meager force of a Sudanese non-commissioned officer and six Sudanese soldiers and a few native carriers and mules for the conveyance of supplies. Not much of a force to capture a determined man, who was known to have a large armed native following! But the Sudanese army officers are always willing and accustomed to take long chances and risk longer odds. His orders were explicit—Rogers was to be caught, "dead or alive."

Up the banks of the Nile went the little party of soldiers and their white leader and ever in advance of them was the fearless Rogers, laughing in his sleeve and content in the belief that he could outwit the most determined pursuit. But he had misjudged the caliber of the man who had been sent after him!

Day by day the little party kept on down the Nile, up the Nile, across the Nile, first in the Congo territory and then in Uganda territory. Doubling and redoubling on their tracks, they never gave up hope. The temperature was the modest one of 120° in the shade; and it was considered cold if the night's temperature fell as low as 90°.

You have to sample this Nile climate to know what it really means. Somehow, after beingt hrough it, one can no longer fear the eternal furnaces of the hereafter, which we are led to expect in expiation of our sins. Hell could not possibly be any hotter.

THE COUNTRY OF DEATH

THE country is a dried-up and useless barren waste. "Mean country" seems hardly an adequate term for it. For miles and miles there is nothing but giant undergrowth, grasses standing twice a man's height, and ugly thorn Mimosa trees; rivers at one season swollen and impossible to cross, at others dried up and waterless; game practically non-existent; natives ready to spear you if you relax for a moment your bold front and, above all, heat and thirst unbearable.

You can not camp where anybody else has camped, for you would then risk death from the dreaded Spirillum tick. You can not drink the waters of the rivers without fear of becoming a victim of the terrible guinea-worm, which eats into your flesh and finally, at the end of three months, begins to worm its way out. Every morning you have to take a half-hitch on the loathesome worm and ease its outward progress. They say it takes six months for the worm to come out altogether—six horrible months of daily terror. Then again there is the malarial fever in plenty; blackwater-fever; sleeping-sickness from the tsetse fly, with the natives dying all around you from it in their thousands and—as if this list were not enough to scare any living man—there are many ghastly diseases which are as yet unknown to science. Dante, when he wrote about his Inferno, must have seen this Hades, or dreamed of it.

I have been through that country—God-forsaken as it is—and know it. Heaven forbid that circumstances should ever take my footsteps back there again.

And what Fox went through in pursuit of Rogers was only what the latter experienced in trying to escape capture.

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If Rogers was dauntless and determined to evade capture and still continue poaching, Fox was equally so. We have the picture here of two men, the one cunning, fearless and with the advantage of knowing the country like a book and with the natives on his side, and the other resolved to complete the task set him. Many a man might have turned back from the chase after Rogers, to acknowledge defeat, before he had been two weeks on the trail. But not Fox! You have only to look into his eyes to know that you are face to face with a man who does not know defeat and whose duty is so clear to him that death seems a small penalty for failure. No two men could possibly be more alike in character than the pursued and the pursuer in this drama of the Congo.

CAPTAIN FOX—QUIET HERO

FAIR-HAIRED, with a slight, fair mustache, and bronzed from the tropical sun, Fox is a man of about five-feet-eleven, but broad of shoulders. A long row of war-medal ribbons on his left breast tell a tale of many hand-shakes with Death, They must tell their own tale, however, for Fox is mute about them.

Knowing Captain Fox as I do, I can fully realize that his six weeks' chase after Rogers was an adventure after his own heart. The bare details, contained in his official report and his letter to me, are typical of the man. Soldierly brevity and modesty are two of his many estimable characteristics. Yet, behind them lies a story such as equals, if indeed it does not surpass, that of Stanley and Livingstone.

THROUGH trackless swamps, surrounded always by hostile natives who refused to give him any information as to the whereabouts of the gang of poachers, Captain Fox kept up the pursuit with relentless energy and untiring perseverance. So rough was the country that he traversed, and so infinitely laborious, that the gallant officer was himself in rags and tatters when he at last came face to face with the poacher. Six weeks through such a country, marching day and night when occasion demanded—and it frequently did demand—are not conducive to keeping up a smart appearance.

Now and again during those terrible six weeks of hardships Fox and his men came across camps which had been deserted by the poachers after they had been warned of the approach of the soldiers. Time and time again, the pursuers barely missed Rogers and his followers. The poacher knew his country well and had every advantage on his side, for he had the natives well in hand. He led the pursuers over hills and across valleys, through swamps and over rivers, through dark and thick forests and across the plains of sunburned grass. Always he was well in the advance.

Something of the spirit which must have possessed both pursuer and pursued can be gleaned from the story of the final meeting between these two men. They had both learned to respect each other's manly and determined qualities. Something of respect and admiration must have dominated each man when he thought of the other. One can understand that Captain Fox must have wished that Rogers had turned his talents into other and more worthy fields. In his official report, Fox pays Rogers this tribute.

At last, Rogers led the pursuers over into the Belgian territory of the Congo. By this time Fox and his party had completely exhausted all their food supplies and were living on native food which they bought from the tribesmen. Not all the natives were willing to trade food. They had no salt, and luxuries such as tea or coffee were unobtainable.

All the party suffered intensely from malarial fever and, worst of all, they had no quinine with which to drive it out of their systems. But they did not give up hope of success in their undertaking. Each drawback was a fresh incentive to more determined effort, for there were many signs that the protracted pursuit was nearing its end.

ONE day they reached a river which had been crossed only a few hours previously by Rogers and his party. They had already come across fresh tracks and a recently deserted camp. The bridge across the river was lying in a confused and useless heap in the water, for Rogers had seen to it that there should be no easy path on his trail. Search where they would, no canoes were forthcoming.

Nothing daunted, they set to work to build a temporary suspension bridge. At

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last they had thrown one across the river, capable of supporting them in their passage. All was ready for continuing the pursuit. Captain Fox ordered his non-commissioned officer to lead the way, while he himself brought up the rear. The first three men passed in safety and then the bridge gave way.

Luckily for Fox, more material was at hand with which to make another bridge. But this would take time. He found that the natives in the vicinity were friendly disposed toward him and he decided to send forward his native officer and the two men who had already crossed the river, so that they might endeavor to overtake the poachers, or at least keep track of their whereabouts.

AT BAY

SOME hours later, Captain Fox and the rest of his men crossed the river on the second suspension bridge. Worn out, wet and hungry, they reached a village late at night. Here they learned that the poachers had shot a native for disobeying an order given by Rogers. This had happened only that morning, so now they were hot on the trail of Rogers.

Despite their pitiable condition, on learning of this murder Captain Fox and his weary men at once set out in the dark in pursuit. They traveled all that night and the greater part of the next day. Toward sunset they came in sight of an immense village square, around which were posted a hundred of the armed native followers of the poacher. Captain Fox halted his small party of four Sudanese to see if he could find any sign of the three men who had gone on in advance of him. But they were nowhere to be seen.

Slowly Captain Fox advanced until he stood in the center of the armed men.

"Where is the white man, your master?" he asked authoritatively.

The armed natives watched him sullenly, without vouchsafing reply. At last, after what seemed like hours to the captain, one of the natives pointed silently toward a large house in the center of the village.

FOX approached the house indicated, with his rifle cocked and ready for instant use in case of need. He halted a few paces from the house and summoned Rogers to come out and surrender. No reply came to the first summons and so he repeated it twice more.

All remained as silent as the grave and Fox began to suspect treachery. But he kept his eyes on the door.

Suddenly it opened; and a native servant came out and saluted Fox.

"The commandant wants you to come in," he said, in his native dialect. "He is sick, and can not come out to you."

At first it looked suspicious, but Fox decided to risk any trap. He walked toward the house and left his rifle outside leaning against the wall. Then he called to his soldiers to remain on guard and allow no one to leave the house while he was in it.

"If any white man attempts to escape, shoot him dead," he instructed them.

Then he passed in through the doorway.

He found himself in a large dark room, lighted by a single flickering candle. For a moment his eyes failed to see anything, but gradually he became accustomed to the dark light and made out the figure of a white man lying on a camp-cot. Beside him sat another white man, who was unknown to Fox. He had heard that there was another white man with Rogers, whom the natives called "Doctor," but his identity had never been learned by the government.

Surrounding the bed were ten armed native followers of Rogers, who eyed the soldier with sullen suspicion.

THE ARREST OF THE UNCROWNED KING

FOX stood inside the door and looked from one white man to the other. He believed that he had walked into a trap, but he did not flinch from the consequences. His mind was working quickly, to devise some means of capturing his man without a struggle.

"Which is Mr. Rogers?" he asked, breaking the strained silence.

"Mr. Rogers has been shot" replied the white man sitting beside the cot, with a growl of anger.

"Yes, and by your men."

The man on the bed spoke thickly and as if in great pain.

"I am sorry, very sorry indeed, that you have been wounded, Mr. Rogers." Fox walked slowly forward to the bed. "I hope

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it is not serious, but certainly you are mistaken in thinking my soldiers did it."

"No!" Rogers thundered at him, partly rising in bed and falling back with a groan. The other white man tried to soothe him. "It was by the soldiers you sent here to arrest me," he continued, with bitter hate.

"There were three of my men on ahead of me, it is true," Fox replied, "but I am convinced they would not have shot at you or interfered with you."

The man on the bed eyed the soldier sternly, without answering. For a few moments there was silence.

"Come and stand right here so that I can have a look at you," Rogers ordered Fox suddenly. "Now, tell me what you want with me."

Captain Fox, being still unarmed, went and stood beside the bed. Under the red blankets covering Rogers could be seen the shape of a heavy revolver. It was pointing straight at Fox's breast. Rogers's eyes were blazing. Still the soldier did not flinch.

"Well, you're a cool one," Rogers admitted grudgingly. "Do you know I have you covered with my Colt?"

"Yes, but you won't dare to shoot," Fox laughed quietly.

"Won't dare! Why not, I should like to know?" Rogers answered back. "I have over a hundred armed men outside and you only have four men with you, so my men tell me."

"Nevertheless, you won't dare shoot me or molest my men. You are under arrest, Mr. Rogers, for illicit ivory-poaching, murder, entering a closed district without a permit, and carrying a gun without a license."

"So that is what I am charged with, is it?" Rogers smiled grimly. "Have you no other charges to prefer?"

"You're wounded now. Let all that rest until you are better."

"No, I'm a dying man, I guess. Do you know you're in the Belgian territory, that you are surrounded by my men, and that you stand more chance of arrest than I do?"

"You are mistaken. I am not in Belgian territory and we need not discuss the chances of my arrest."

"I wish I were feeling better," Rogers answered resentfully, "and I'd soon convince you."

BY THIS time Rogers had worked himself into a fury and Captain Fox deemed that his last moment had come. The room was so dark that it was impossible to tell what the ten natives were doing or whether they were closing in on him.

Listen keenly as he could, Fox was unable to detect any movement. Rogers's revolver under the blanket still pointed at Fox's breast.

"You must calm yourself, Mr. Rogers," Fox assured him. "Excitement is bad for your wound. I have only acted under orders and have here a letter for you from the Sudan government."

He handed over a torn and dirty official envelope to the dying man, who took it and seemed to calm down. He painfully turned over on his bed. With a motion of his hand in dismissal, he ignored the presence of the officer.

Captain Fox deemed it wise not to excite the man any more and silently withdrew from the room. Once outside, he set to work to disarm the armed followers of the dying Rogers. This was soon accomplished, for they were cowed, now that their leader was helpless.

In the middle of the night a native servant came to Captain Fox to say that Rogers was dying, and that he wished to speak to the officer. The soldiers did not want him to go into the house again. But Captain Fox was not to be deterred.

As he entered the house, Rogers turned to his white companion, saying,

"Doctor, I wish you to hear and be a witness to what I am going to say to Captain Fox. I surrender myself voluntarily to the Sudan government. I want you to see that the Doctor gets into no trouble over this affair, Captain. I believe I am a dying man, so that I am not going to lie about it. This was my show and all my work. The Doctor is blameless."

ON THE following afternoon the three soldiers who had been sent on ahead arrived at the village and gave Captain Fox an account of their experience.

They stated that on arriving in the poacher's stronghold Rogers ordered them to give up their arms. He seized his Mauser rifle and opened fire with it and a revolver. His companion, the Doctor, also

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fired on the soldiers with a Winchester. Others attacked them with Winchesters and with arrows. Had it not been almost dark, the soldiers would have been killed and, as it was, they all had narrow escapes, all of them being hit.

In the fighting, Rogers was struck by a soldier's bullet, which lodged near the hip, but he walked to his house and sat down in a chair.

By this time Captain Fox was satisfied that he was on Belgian territory and wrote to the Belgian commandant to explain the occurrence. Two days later the Belgian officer arrived on the scene with a large escort of troops. In the meantime the transport of Captain Fox's party, which had been left behind, also arrived. The British officer was in rags and had not shaved or washed for over a week. That night he was asked to dine with the Belgian, but, as he was still nursing Rogers, he declined. The Belgians took charge of all the prisoners—Rogers, the Doctor and the native followers—and asked Captain Fox to disarm his men. This he did, for he knew that he was on Belgian soil.

THE AMERICAN POACHER'S HEROIC DEATH

THE day after the arrival of the Belgians, Rogers was obviously dying, and sent for Fox. He was conscious to the end, and described his symptoms.

"Say, Doctor, give me a drink of water. I have got a bad taste in my mouth. That is mortification setting in," he remarked.

He took a long drink from the proffered glass and sank back on the bed. His eyes never left the British officer's face. Suddenly, he made a curious, rattling noise in his throat. Fox and the Doctor heard it and knew the end had come.

"Say, Doc," he remarked, "did you hear that? It is the death-rattle. I've heard it too often to be mistaken."

There was no terror of the "Great Unknown" in his eyes and he calmly faced his end. Fox and the Doctor crept close to the dying man and did all they could to ease his pain, but Rogers was slipping away from them fast. They expected him to die every moment, but he still fought on for life.

"Say, Captain, you are a big fellow and strong. Lift me up once more—for the last time," he muttered presently. "I shall not be here to-morrow. I'm still pretty heavy, ain't I?"

Fox leaned over him and gently raised him on the bed, with his arms under the dying man's shoulders.

"I'm sorry, Rogers," he said. "But you brought this on yourself."

"I know, old man. You're all right. I would rather have surrendered to you than any one. Good-by, Doc. Good-by, Captain. Remember, the Doctor is innocent, all my sh——"

HIS head dropped back as his spirit went to render its last account to its Maker. Gently Fox laid the body of the poacher on the bed and then turned away to escape the sorrow of the Doctor, who was deeply unstrung by his friend's death.

And so this man died, far away from his friends and country. Full of courage and grit to the end, his fate was worthy of a better cause. So did the curtain fall upon the most dramatic tragedy in the history of the Congo elephant-poachers.

That afternoon, Rogers was buried, and later the Belgian official took the Doctor and one of Rogers's gun-bearers for trial at Nyangera, in the Congo. The identity of the Doctor has been disclosed by neither the Belgians nor Captain Fox. Both have respected a dead man's last wish.

In a lonely grave, in a God-forsaken country, the last remains of this American poacher and uncrowned king—possibly the last of the breed—slumber now in peace.

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The Uplift in Dixeyville.

by Daniel Louis Hanson.

TWO documents of entirely different natures, arriving at Renwick's desk at the same time, were responsible for a business inspiration destined to increase materially the dividends of Moses Irons and Company. One was the foundry stock-sheet; the other, Mansur's request for his annual vacation.

The stock-sheet showed a big surplus of pipe on hand, with but few unfilled orders, and the rush-season sixty days off; while the prospect of losing the suave but alert Mansur from the sales-force for a whole month added to the griefs of the already overburdened sales-manager. Clearly, the foundry must shut down for the Summer months or be put on special work.

"Drinking-fountains! We have a full line of patterns; it is a dry Summer; it is simply a question of working a new field. Why not send Mansur into a hitherto undeveloped territory? Why not go into the South?"

While it was clearly Renwick's idea to send Mansur and Everett down South to sell drinking-fountains that Summer, the scheme, considered in its various phases, had seemed so good to Moses Irons that he took all the credit of the plan to himself. With characteristic enthusiasm, he elaborated the idea in its various details. They were to take black-painted wooden models, half-size, of the entire line of fountains—ten trunks all told.

"This is the psychological moment," said Moses Irons, with great earnestness. "The local-option wave is sweeping the South like a flame and will create, already has created, a demand for water-fountains. They must drink something, therefore water from one of our artistic fountains 'made for man, beast and fowl.' These fountains are triumphs of art, too; one on each corner would tone up any village and the Proserpine Fountain in the Public Square would give the place the air of a metropolis. Then you boys get ninety dollars a ton for pig-iron made up into fountains, and only thirty dollars if it's worked up into cast-iron pipe. The South needs encouragement in this new Uplift Movement, and you, Mansur, shall take Everett with you and give them a helping hand. When the South asks, 'After the saloon, what?' you and Everett can point to our fountains and reply, 'These!'"

SO IT transpired that in late July, when Mansur had hoped for a few weeks at some northern lake, and Everett was bewailing the misfortune which took him away from the cool cellars where his brewery-trade was to be found at that season, the two were steaming southward, in more senses than one, with ten cases in the baggage-car ahead.

Short stops were made at various cities in Kentucky and Tennessee, with but slight results. Their objective point, however, was Dixeyville, Georgia. And this for two reasons: Dixeyville was indubitably the city that set the pace for the entire South; the arbiter of Southern taste and fashion; the molder of Southern public opinion.

As Dixeyville decided, so decided the rest of the South; and at Dixeyville resided Mrs. Hartung, the leader of the Southern

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Total Abstinence Movement. To secure her endorsement and coöperation would be an assurance of success. So to Dixeyville Mansur and Everett traveled with their ten trunks.

As every traveler knows, the famous Hotel Everglade is located in the heart of the business-center of the metropolis, lifting its seven fluted pillars as a protest against modernism, as exemplified by the plain mercantile structures facing on the other three sides of the square; and it was to the Hotel Everglade that the two Northerners went.

It was eminently fitting that Mansur should have led this crusade into the South, for Mansur was a Southerner by birth and inclination. Not by accident did he wear long drooping mustachios and a goatee. The frock coat and soft-brimmed hat were his regular costume. Frequently he had been accosted in the streets of Chicago by artists seeking a model for Confederate monuments. But the tall, dark-complexioned and well-groomed Mansur scorned all such advances—as would any Southern gentleman.

On the other hand, Everett, who had been rudely torn away from his daily vocation of selling pipe and fittings to the brewery-trade, represented an entirely different type of personality. Short of stature and of rotund figure, he had a ruddy face which bore a perpetual invitation to good cheer. These physical characteristics, and a habit of wiping his mouth at frequent intervals with the back of his hand, would have qualified him eminently for the part of the "horrible example" in a living charade—with the stately Mansur doing the moral preceptor part.

IN ADDITION to Parlor A, Mansur and Everett had been given an adjoining bedroom and bath, forming a continuous suite. The parlor itself they turned into an exhibit-room, draping the walls in white sheets to secure an effective background for the black-painted models. The middle of the large apartment was reserved for Moses Irons's masterpiece—Proserpine. The artist, working under the impetuous inspiration of the ironmaster, had done some violence to the mythological conception of the goddess, having placed the daughter of Zeus knee-deep in a huge iron bowl filled with water, which she overbrimmed into a lower and larger basin by emptying a shell held in her right hand, thus forming a continuous supply for "man, beast and fowl."

In order to give the Greek divinity enough head-room, it had become necessary to remove the massive gas-chandelier from the position it had so long occupied. The landlord himself superintended this solemn ceremony.

"People have come clear from New York to see that chandelier," he said, with tearful voice.

Around the walls were grouped the various other models, "all sizes and prices." One horse-trough had, like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, a dual character, "being especially designed for Y. M. C. A.'s and W. C. T. U.'s," or, if the other circular could be credited, "being just the trough for the outside of saloons, and of special interest to brewers!"

Mansur had planned his Dixeyville campaign with the strategy of a Hannibal. Dixeyville must be conquered, and he aimed high. Two dignitaries were first of all invited to view the exhibit in Parlor A—the mayor of the city and Mrs. Hartung, the president of the Southern Total Abstinence Society. The mayor was expected at eleven in the morning, while Mrs. Hartung had herself selected high noon as the time of her visit. Mr. Everett had several half-formed plans for the entertainment of his honor, while Mansur had given considerable thought to whether or not he should invite Mrs. Hartung to luncheon. As his conversation with her had been over the 'phone, he decided to see his visitor face to face before making her his guest. A luncheon-engagement with Mrs. Hartung would necessarily eliminate Everett for the time being, as he had a habit of illustrating his conversations with references to the various customers he had among the large brewers of the country.

In the interval of waiting, Everett turned the bathroom into a buffet, stocking it well with goods which he felt sure would have a local flavor.

The mayor sauntered in half an hour late, bringing with him an expansive smile matched only by fully as expansive a shirt-bosom. In choice phrases, he welcomed them to Dixeyville, and "to the Southland." They were his guests—as mayor of Dixeyville, he had the honor of

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being their host. The city was theirs. If a policeman so much as looked at them—"take his number, for they have all had instructions." The mayor was delighted that they had come clear from Chicago; delighted by the line of goods they had to sell—though as yet he was not posted as to what that line might be—in short he welcomed them! When Mansur spoke to him as "your honor," he asked that the title of "Major" be used.

"I swept with Jackson to the hills overlooking Washington, gentlemen, and all I got out of it was my brevet—no hard feelings either, gentlemen."

Everett now felt that too much time had been lost in preliminaries.

"Will the Major join us——"

No frown appeared on the executive face, so, from the improvised buffet, Everett produced a decanter and six glasses; also a pitcher of ice-water. He grouped these impediments on the base of the horse-trough model. Then he offered the decanter to the mayor, who, with a fine sense of courtesy, waved it toward Mansur. It remained in the hands of the executive, however. Carefully, the mayor poured out just enough liquor so that four fingers could not be seen through the side of the glass. Mansur merely covered the bottom of his tumbler, leaving it to the enthusiastic Everett to emulate Dixeyville's chief executive as to quantity—which he did.

"Gentlemen, to the success of your mission in the South," and the major made a comprehensive gesture with his right hand, using the other to lend the proper emphasis to the toast.

THIS initiatory ceremony disposed of, the mayor began to study the models which filled the room. First of all, he examined the modernized Proserpine, at the same time regretting that it had been necessary to remove, even temporarily, "that glittering work of art, the finest chandelier in the world, gentlemen. There are over eight hundred crystal prisms on it, and when alight at night, the effect is simply gorgeous."

At this moment Everett offered a glass of water to the mayor, but he shook his head in refusal, vigorously.

"It takes the bouquet off the liquor, don't you think so, sir?" and he turned to Mansur for reply. "I take it, sir, that you are a Southerner?"

Having received an affirmative answer and having expressed his delight, he again returned to a contemplation of Proserpine.

"A magnificent figure of a woman, gentlemen. The model for a war-memorial, I take it."

"For a drinking-fountain, Major," explained Mansur. "There is a lower pool that we could not show in the model, because of taking too much room. It helps to give the whole fixture better proportion, though."

"What is your line, gentlemen?" demanded the mayor, with a sudden access of severity.

Everett, who was busy with the glassware, left it for Mansur to appease the clearly perturbed executive.

"Drinking-fountains, your honor—Major! We have——"

"*Water* drinking-fountains, for——"

" 'For man, beast and fowl,' your honor."

"And are all these," with a sweep of the arm, "are all these water drinking-fountains?"

Mansur confessed that such they were.

An unmistakable frown settled over the hitherto cheerful official countenance, only to be dissipated in a very short time as Everett tactfully clinked the tumblers in rearranging them on the pedestal of the horse-trough model.

Again the mayor fell into a study of Zeus' daughter.

"The figure is rather—undraped—is it not?"

"Yes, Major, but the shell she holds above her head sprays a fine mist which envelopes the entire figure so that it is seen only in dim outline through it."

"What an awful waste of water," was the executive comment, as the mayor passed on to study the next group—"Centaur."

Mansur joined him and gave a brief description of each model.

Standing side by side, the two men presented a striking similarity in appearance. But for a few years' difference in age, they might have passed for twins. In fact, their mode of dress might have helped carry out that fiction, for Mansur was arrayed in a gray-colored frock-suit, while the mayor wore black.

Mansur, in whom the sales-instinct was

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strong, lost sight of his guest in the goods he was exploiting; but Everett, ever a close student of human nature, saw that the mayor had difficulty in even simulating an interest in the models over which the Northerner waxed so enthusiastic. So the social Everett neatly arranged his glasses, decanter and ice-water carafe on the base of the horse-trough model.

Presently, the rounds finished, the two men joined him. Over the face of the mayor hung a cloud as gloomy as a heavy fog. Then began Everett's pleasant task of lifting that gloom.

"Mr. Mayor, a few moments ago you were so good as to wish us success in our expedition. Permit us now in return to felicitate the City of Dixeyville on her rare fortune in the choice of a chief executive. May she show the excellent sense of reëlecting him to that office repeatedly. May he have the grace to continue giving himself for the public service——"

As Everett spoke, the gloom began to lift, and, before he had finished, the official countenance was as serene as a sunny sky. Again Dixeyville's mayor courteously offered the decanter to Mansur; again it remained in the major's right hand while four fingers of his left were lost to sight; again Mansur merely covered the bottom of his glass; again Everett emulated his guest's example.

The three men looked at each other over the edges of their tumblers, but lowered them immediately, for there was a knock at the door, which stood ajar. Before Mansur could take more than one step toward it, it was pushed clear open by another brass-buttoned bell-boy, who announced, "Mrs. Hartung to see Mr. Mansur and Mr. Everett," then stepped to one side, to permit the entrance of a handsome and elaborately dressed lady, the president of the Southern Total Abstinence Society.

OF the three men interrupted in an innocent exemplification of good-fellowship, Mansur was the most unfortunately placed, being in the center of the room on his way to the door. But Mansur was an artist in working out of awkward predicaments. Holding the scantily filled tumbler concealed in the hollow of one hand, he held the other out in greeting to the South's greatest temperance-worker.

"We are honored by your visit, madam, and"— turning to include his companions in the conversation—"it is hardly necessary to present our other honored guest to Mrs. Hartung."

Mrs. Hartung raised her lorgnette and slowly surveyed the mayor from head to foot, while that official bowed with as much dignity as is possible for one who holds secreted in the skirts of his frock coat a glass nearly full of liquor.

"We have met earlier to-day," said Mrs. Hartung, then turned to Mansur, who had succeeded in handing his tumbler to the bell-boy, at the same time giving him a push down the hall toward the servant's stairway.

"I have but a few moments this morning, sir. You have something that will further the great work in which I am interested?"

Mansur was again the alert salesman, looking for an opportunity to exploit his goods.

"I think, madam, that our entire line of models will interest you. These are the models of drinking-fountains—of water-fountains," he hastened to qualify, "adapted for every situation. This magnificent design—in which your honored mayor has been greatly interested—Proserpine, is intended for the center of a plaza such as the one on which this hotel——"

Mansur's sentence began to drag, for Mrs. Hartung had taken one brief look at Proserpine, then had leveled her lorgnette at the mayor. Nor did the executive especially enjoy the scrutiny, for he was distinctly heard to say, "Ahem," twice. He immediately began a minute examination of the "Centaur" model which stood along the wall, at the far end of the apartment.

Mansur again tried to gain the attention of his auditor and succeeded—for the space of less than a minute: "And here," turning to the horse-trough model, which was still embellished with the ice-water pitcher, "is a design especially intended for W. C. T. U.'s and Y. M. C. A.'s—in front of such or kindred institutions."

Mansur felt himself getting cold, in spite of the heat which poured in through every window, for Mrs. Hartung was certainly sniffing the air—in a refined manner certainly, yet sniffing.

"It seems to me, sir, as if there were an odor of liquor in this room. It is positively oppressive to one——"

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"Undoubtedly, Mrs. Hartung," said Mansur, in his most sympathetic tone. "It is alcohol—wood-alcohol of course—used in the varnish with which these models are covered. They had a fresh coat this morning," and he gave Everett a look which was supposed to be annihilatory.

But the unfortunate Everett who, with a hand in each side pocket of his coat, was trying his best to keep decanter and tumblers from jingling, and at the same time to keep out of range of Mrs. Hartung's eyes, stepped right into the line of vision. In his laudable desire to keep a straight countenance in the presence of the good lady, his face, generally ruddy, deepened into a dark red and his polite cough ended in a strangling snort.

"I have not had the honor," began Mrs. Hartung, focusing Everett with the ever-ready lorgnette.

With Mansur, sales were everything. He regretted that Everett had been indiscreet in showing himself under such unfavorable conditions, so it was Everett who must suffer.

"Oh, just a helper—a packer of models—a porter," and Mansur, looked the now enraged Everett squarely in the eyes. The situation was a painful one, and fast hastening to a climax which would have gone far toward alienating the sympathies of Mrs. Hartung, when a terrific noise was heard from the center of the room.

THE mayor, having found himself for the moment out of the limelight of observation, had successfully climbed the Proserpine fountain and had concealed his incriminating glass in the upper bowl, at the feet of the statue. In descending, his good luck left him. He slipped, fell and landed on all fours in the frog-basin at the base.

Mansur hastened to lift the executive to an upright position, solicitously inquiring at the same time if there were any serious injuries.

"No—but it was a good thing it was dry." Then, seeing the relentless lorgnette holding him in its focus, he added, "I wanted to see how the water is supplied to the shell she holds in her hand."

"And how is it supplied, pray?" asked Mrs. Hartung, with a sudden show of interest.

"I did not get that far," replied the unfortunate mayor—a reply which was greeted with a snort by Everett, who seemed to be the only one of the three spectators to grasp the reasons for the mayor's startling acrobatic feats.

After giving Everett a withering look, the stately Mrs. Hartung again gave her attention to Proserpine.

"That is a very interesting research in which you made so heroic an attempt, Mr. Mayor. How is it supplied?" and she directed the inquiry to Mansur.

"By a very clever device," replied that gentleman, glad to get his visitors interested in his goods. "It has a self-regulating valve which supplies just enough water to keep the frog-basin filled to its rim, yet does away with the waste from a continual overflow—so common in fountains made by other concerns. I wish, madam, that you could see it. Possibly——"

He thought for an instant that Everett, who was back of Mrs. Hartung, had signaled him, and hesitated. But Everett had evidently remembered the part of porter which had been assigned to him, and looked on with the most stolid of faces. The mayor seemed somewhat agitated, though. But with the lorgnette sweeping the horizon, there was no opportunity for investigating what might have been a distress-signal.

So Mansur continued, "I might ring for a step-ladder, if you——"

"I should be delighted to see it—and then we might help the mayor up to complete his investigations."

As Mansur stepped toward the bell, Mrs. Hartung suggested, "Why not have the porter get it. I have only a few minutes left."

Nothing remained then for Mansur but to send the "porter," giving him, however, a conciliatory wink. This was ignored by Everett, but he did acknowledge a signal which the mayor sent him. This silent exchange between Dixeyville's highest official and a red-faced porter did not escape the quick-eyed president.

"While we are waiting for the ladder, I shall be glad to have you give just a moment to these new sanitary drinking-fountains, which are now used so much in schools," and Mansur led the way to a distant part of the spacious apartment.

This was the opportunity the mayor

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wanted. He must recover the liquor-glass reposing so serenely at the feet of Proserpine. With surprising agility, he mounted the rim of the frog-basin, then swung himself up to the base of the upper bowl, from which it was only a few inches to the much-desired glass—but something gave way—it was a long distance to the frog basin, and he had made it once already that day—so the mayor grasped desperately at the nearest object, which was the statue itself. It yielded. It toppled. And down into the frog-pool came the mayor of Dixeyville, with the ebony-hued Proserpine in his arms.

And there, and in that attitude, did Mrs. Hartung and Mansur find him when they reached the model. That the mayor was alive was apparent at the first glance, also that his injuries were not physical ones. Mansur, for the second time that forenoon, offered "first aid," while Mrs. Hartung sought the nearest chair and gave way to laughter.

"Surely, Mr. Mayor, not even your worst political enemies, if they now saw you, could say that you draw the color line." Then a little later, "Couldn't you have waited till the step-ladder was brought?"

But something rolled against her feet. Looking down, she suddenly became grave, picked up a glass, daintily lifted it to her nostrils, critically sniffed at it, then raised her lorgnette and withered the mayor of Dixeyville with one scornful glance.

A WEEK later, Mr. Mansur was making a business call at the residence of Mrs. R. B. Hartung. The conversation had about reached its conclusion.

"I believe that your idea of a fountain in the square is a good one, Mr. Mansur. It would be slow work raising the money by popular subscription, so I will advance it out of my own pocket."

Mr. Mansur bowed his approval and gratitude at one and the same time, and waited for his hostess to continue, as she did, after a moment's reflection. "But I think it best to have the gift come from my husband, as it were. It would have more influence, under the circumstances. So on the pedestal please have this cast."

She handed him a memorandum:

DEDICATED
TO
THE UPLIFT OF DIXEYVILLE
BY ITS
MAYOR, R. B. HARTUNG
1908

Again Mr. Mansur bowed his gratitude. Only one question now agitated him.

"And which design have you selected, Mrs. Hartung?"

She looked at him with a quizzical smile, at the same time toying with the gold-mounted lorgnette:

"The one which he so admired that day—the Proserpine Fountain!"

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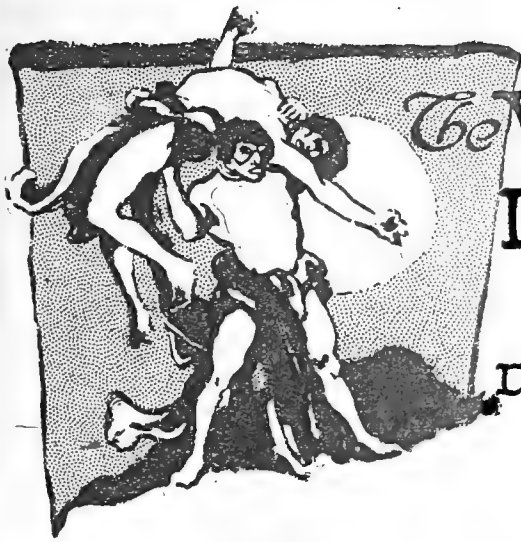

The Wail of the Pogaree

by

Donald Francis McGrew

THROUGH the story of all the expeditions against the Moros which the Spanish garrison at Iligan used to make in the days before the American occupation of the Philippines runs the wail of the Pogaree, a note as savage as the defense of the Moros.

Pogaree is the Moro term meaning friend. Rather a unique name for a baby born of a father to whom friendship was an unknown quantity—but on the day that old Dato Qudrat looked down at his first-born, something seemed to melt in the withered old breast, like warm wine running through a field of ice.

"This boy shall be named Pogaree," he announced, turning to the priest. A goldrare light of love accompanied the pride in his eyes. "Allah is good. Praised be Allah. He shall sit at my side when my thews are feeble and he is grown great, a true friend of his father."

It mattered not that his mother gave up her life to yield his. In Qudrat's eyes, she was, apparently, but a means to an end.

True, old Bohayan, who was destined to be his foster-mother, and who had but recently lost her husband and given birth to a daughter, did shed a few tears. But even as she looked at the youngster there, she began planning for her daughter's future. And when Nambli, then a five-year-old tot of a boy who was being trained for Qudrat's private retinue, sought to get a closer view of the new heir, she cuffed him away, saying, "Your hands are not for such as he. Begone!"

So Pogaree was christened and grew. But, if old Qudrat thrilled with unaccustomed pride as he looked on his only son, he concealed it well, for in his heart he deemed himself a wise man. As proof of it, he had but to gaze complacently on his wide domains in the region of Lake Lanao. His well-tilled farms produced great crops of sweet potatoes, rice and hemp, and yearly filled his coffers deeper. And had he inherited all these luxuries? Not he. Allah was good—but Allah was better to Moros who raised themselves above the common horde of slaves he now controlled; lifted themselves by taking shrewd advantage of opportunities, by making one farm produce another.

The boy was to learn the harder parts of life. He must endure physical hardships to develop the brawn he promised, must learn, through hardships, to appreciate the wealth he would one day fall heir to.

Many a banker has reasoned in parallel lines with old Qudrat. But Qudrat put them into effect there on the festering island of Mindanao, and so, from the time he was able to toddle, little Pogaree found himself emulating his father's slaves in the pack-train, beginning with one small coconut on his head and eventually rising to the dignity of carrying a sack that forced grunts from three men as they lifted it to his head.

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Times had been peaceful for a period of years in the region of Lake Lanao, for the stinging memory of a disastrous defeat remained with the Spanish after one sortie into that district in the seventies. But in '86 an expedition was organized at Iligan to go inland and found the town of Marahui.

Strangely, old Qudrat did nothing. Dato Buswan, hearing of this, made a special trip from his domicile across the lake to inquire into Qudrat's sanity.

Qudrat merely smiled quizzically at his brother Moro.

"As we grow fuller of years, we grow fuller of wisdom, *effendi*," he said. "Let the Spanish plant heavily and bring in new implements we are unable to secure save at enormous cost, my brother. Then, when the new farms are well-tilled and fruitful and the new garrison is lulled by the peace in the land—what then, my brother?"

Buswan, who rarely permitted himself to smile, gazed long and thoughtfully at Qudrat, while a few wrinkles began to twitch in his leathery cheeks.

Then, venting his admiration with a fraternal slap on the back, he cackled, and shouted knowingly over his shoulder as he left, "Allah is good. Praised be Allah!"

Therefore the garrison went forth, garrisoned new posts, and, through a treaty signed by the word of a Moslem, Spanish ranches began to stud the plains.

II

MEANWHILE, young Pogaree worked in the fields, guiding a carabao behind a clumsy wooden plow or, when the pack-trains wended their weekly way to Iligan, took his load upon his head and toiled long sweltering miles down the mountain trails. He had reached the age of twenty, and none in the train could outdistance or outlift him.

Of this Qudrat took covert and prideful note. A certain fly appeared in his ointment, however, and grew daily in size, for the boy was getting discontented. A good sign, in a way, for he who is content never lifts himself above the common herd—but the discontent was shown in features sullened beyond their Moro wont rather than in any effort to raise himself.

If, perchance, the boy would only entice some middleman into a game of salincan, and adroitly cheat him on the ninth stick! Or, if that failed, sneak into his bailiwick some dark night, bolo him and throw his body to some swift-swallowing python! That would have been superb! That would have been excellent! The boy would have shown some tendency to gain a foothold on wealth. But nothing of the kind happened, and Dato Qudrat, gazing sorrowfully at him, cursed the slow-thinking blood of the lad's mother.

Once a slave in the train ventured some expostulating advice to Pogaree, as they halted one day on the hot cogan-trail.

"You are a fool," he said, casting fearsome glances to right and left as he whispered. "Your father waxes rich from the labor of your body, even as he does from that of my worthless one. He does not even give you the easier tasks, such as bearing the princely bolo or carrying his cushro of betel-nut. Look at Nambli, now, with the body-guard. He sits at ease, while you toil daily as a slave. As for women—Wohyo, daughter of Bohayan, casts eyes at you daily and your father will not allow her near you. Even Dato Buswan, should you choose to fly to his casa, would do better for you than that!"

"But Dato Buswan would be forced to give me back—and then?"

"Would you come back—you with the blood of Qudrat in you?" demanded the slave. "Never!" The slave, forgetting caution, waxed bolder. "Rather you would cut the throat of the father who has been less than father!"

Pogaree had no time to answer, for old Qudrat stepped out from behind an unsuspected hiding-place and, when the caravan went on, a foolish slave was left staked over a convenient ant-hill.

"Thus," said Qudrat to his shrinking men, "thus perishes a fool who thinks to interfere with a father's chosen policy."

Thereafter, Pogaree was left alone much more than usual by the members of the pack-train. It gave him time for thought, thought that ran in morose and sullen grooves and engendered a smoldering wrath in his slow-moving mind. Why should he be subjected to this daily humiliation and toil? Why should he, with royal blood in his veins, rub elbows with the sweating, filthy bondsmen while his father, blood of his blood, rode in state behind him, an umbrella-bearer shading his head, a page attending to his every want? Worse still,

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why should he be subjected to the covert grins of that sly-faced Nambli, whom he could twist apart in his hands?

It evolved over and over in his mind as he mechanically trudged along with his pack balanced on his head or mechanically paused to cook his little fish over the tiny fires, but always his mind traveled around the same discontented circle and failed to touch the spark of action his father had longed for, until, one day, Pogaree took note of the constabulary at Iligan.

Like our own native government, the Spanish had enlisted in their service large bodies of native police, or militia, recruited from various islands throughout the Philippines. Predominant among these were the Macabebes, a brave, mercenary tribe, to whom the smell of powder was life and who always served as loyally as though the yellow flag were their own. Occasionally there were companies formed of Moros who had grown discontented and sought more "dinero," but a series of disastrous experiences with these Mohammedan mercenaries cured the Spanish of the habit in Mindanao and so, when occasion demanded, the warlike Macabebes were sent in to garrison this island's posts.

A company of these came into Iligan one day and took quarters in the nipa barracks at the south end of town. On the first trip down after their appearance, Pogaree gazed with slightly more than a desultory interest at a few of them who had strolled down to the Moro market-place. On the second trip, he slipped away from the squatting tradesmen and watched the Macabebes at drill.

He noted their springy step, their well-groomed and well-fed appearance, their close-cropped hair and clean-shaven faces, their reliance and self-respect even when obeying their commander's orders.

After drill was over, he managed to scrape up an acquaintance with a half-caste Moro who had taken the bit in his teeth long since and joined the company up on Luzon.

The ensuing talk filled Pogaree with a fierce resolve. Straightway he went to his father.

"What?" ejaculated Qudrat. "Join those Christian-kissing mongrel dogs? Rather would I see you die before my eyes!"

Pogaree attempted an explanation, but Qudrat's eyes had dwindled to two red-hot needle-points. His son fell away from him as though from a pestilence.

But on the next trip down, the caravan returned without Pogaree, who, when the train had passed from sight, crept out of the grass and went straight to the constabulary officer.

WHEN Qudrat found that his worst apprehensions had been verified, his first impulse was to raze Iligan to the ground. But he thought twice on the matter. Like a pearl in a pigsty, there still remained that one redeeming drop of love in his disappointed heart.

To destroy the town might mean to destroy that very boy. Therefore he would try reason with him.

Pogaree, however, was obdurate. He had cast his die.

"Look upon me now!" he told his father proudly. "Am I not a man?"

Inwardly, Qudrat had to concede the point. Well-groomed, clean-shaven, his broad shoulders thrown back, his chest bulging against his shirt, Pogaree tapered up from ankles to head like a wedge—a bulky, sinewy wedge of a brown-skinned Moro soldier.

Outwardly, however, his father cursed his Mohammedan infidelity. This failing, he took to pleading.

But Pogaree, growing bolder, showed a plain distrust of his father's promises to place him at his side in luxury should he return. Twenty years of the opposite lay dark in his memory. He pointed out that he now had a monthly stipend, had tobacco of his own instead of the filthy betel-nut, slept in a comparatively clean bed and got much more "chow."

Furthermore, there were women in the town who looked better daily. Perhaps he might choose to marry one of those who smiled on him now. Who could tell?

So old Qudrat departed in anger. Pausing at a certain point in the trail that overlooked the town, he gazed at the white fort below and spat, in true Mohammedan vilification. Thus had his father done, and *his* father, back to the time when the high-pooped galleons rode at anchor in the bay with their brass cannons bristling in the sun. Always had the name of Qudrat been lauded in Moro legends as that of the fiercest contenders against the Dons' advance, and he himself, though born with

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no asset save royal blood, due to a defeat his father had suffered, had again placed the name of Qudrat high in the annals of Moro wealth, with the hope that, in addition to this, he could lay as enviable a record of Spanish massacres at Allah's feet as had his ancestors.

And there below him, eating Christian food, swearing allegiance to a Christian flag, walked the very boy his dreams had pictured as a worthy, triumphant heir when his hardship-tempered brain had grown wise in manhood!

Most assuredly he had taken the bit in the teeth—but in what a direction! The old cheeks twitched with rage. Again his narrowing eyes boded ill for the town, but in the end his old turkey-gobbler neck quivered as though swallowing a bitter dose, and he went on up the trail.

Still his queer, gnarled old brain twisted the problem this way and that. Promises had failed to move the boy. What, then, would? A woman? Ah, perhaps that was it! The boy had mentioned a possible marriage some day. So Qudrat called Nambli, who was now high in his retinue, to his side.

"Know you the most beautiful daughter of Dato Bantao?" he asked

Know her? thought Nambli. No, he did not exactly know her, but he had seen her—and, shades of his father, how he desired her!

"I have heard of her, sire," he nodded, his eyelids flickering a little.

"Go you then to my *effendi*, Dato Bantao—may he some day sit close to Allah—and take with you twenty ponies, well-laden, as offering for the beautiful Pajuda. However," with a ghost of a smile, "leave five ponies in the bush before you enter his village."

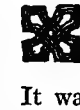
Nambli departed, after venturing the ghost of a smile in return.

Five days later he rode back into Dato Qudrat's stronghold with the fair Pajuda and two ponies at his side, the ponies the recipients of some well directed kicks, the girl of some smoldering glances from his dark eyes.

A close observer might have noted that all had not been well with Pajuda and Nambli and that the girl shrank from his side until they arrived at the barrio. Then she sighed with relief, answered the summons to Qudrat's casa as a matter of course and walked forward resignedly.

When she emerged, she smiled with the sparkling light of mischief in her eyes—and the old foster-mother, Bohayan, immediately guessing the old Dato's purpose, gnashed her teeth in dumb agony, while Bohayan's daughter Wohyo, who loved Pogaree but had failed to move him, flung herself down on her matting, her body shaken with dry sobs.

III



WHEN the next market-day came round, Pogaree, being off duty, strolled down to the market-place. It was good to walk through the lanes of chattering señoritas, twirling his new ebony cane and puffing daintily at a cigarette. It was doubly good to stand and watch the bondsmen in their squalor, for the comparison doubled his appreciation of his own lot. It pleased him mightily to stride among them, paying for trinkets with pesetas tossed as though they were mere bagatelles, watching his father the while, to see how he took it. In this last, he suffered a tinge of disappointment, for apparently Qudrat saw nothing. He was engrossed in a conference with Colonel Don Alfonso Cortijo.

Then Pogaree's gaze fell on Pajuda. It began—but he could not tell how it began. Had her eyes *pulled* his to her? For a long instant his own black orbs looked into hers, that were neither black nor green nor purple. Instead, they were a luring combination of all three. It seemed that a great lamp glowed behind those wonderful pools, speaking, calling, deliciously compelling. He stood agape, breathing heavily. Then the heavy lids drooped. She turned away slowly, gave him one more flashing glance over a well-modeled shoulder and looked dreamily out to sea.

Pogaree straightened. A glance at his father proved that worthy unconscious of his presence, so he strode casually, always casually, in Pajuda's direction, halting as he reached a seemingly guileless position near her side.

"Girl!" he blurted in the Moro tongue.

She paid no attention.

"Girl!" he whispered huskily, insistently.

This time she turned to him. No society matron could have outrivaled her. Her eyes, no longer glowing, were well-schooled and remote, while her red lips, flickering

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with the merest hint of a smile, were as mocking as the dainty shrug she gave in turning away.

Choking a flare of anger, Pogaree walked off through the narrow streets, all unconscious that Wohyo, too, had been watching; vowing that he had been a fool.

But the next Saturday found him at the market again. All week he had dreamed unwillingly of two great glowing eyes and now, though his brain was grudging, his feet seemed to have formed a diabolic partnership with his heart. They led him to her, whether or no. A repetition of the first meeting took place, for that mesmeric glow drew him on to receive a cold-water dash upon his approach. So it was the next week, and the next, till, waking and sleeping, his dreams were full of a picture of Oriental exquisiteness that grew more desirable with every breath.

He took to walking to the beach at night, there to moon and ponder and struggle with this new thing that had come into his life. On one of these restless walks he found his decrepit old foster-mother waiting for him under the palms.

Age had dried her neck till it twisted this way and that, but he knew her emaciated hulk held a heart that had always been outwardly soft to him. Hence he strode quickly to meet her.

"What are you doing here?" he queried. She told him the caravan had come down that night and, wishing to see him, she had slipped away and found him there.

"Is—is that new maiden with the caravan?" he breathed.

Bohayan laid a parchment hand upon his heavy shoulder.

"Oh, my son, it is she I came to talk of——"

"Yes, yes, Bohayan. What is her name? Who is she? Has my father taken a new wife to wed?"

"No," sighed Bohayan, not failing to note how he hung on her answer and glowed at the last. "My son, is it as bad as that? I came to warn you. Her name is Pajuda. She is the daughter of Dato Bantao. But take warning, my son; the blood of the snake flows through her veins—and—but I dare say no more."

"It is the mother in you talking," smiled the dense Pogaree, touching her hand in an awkward caress. "Then she is not wedded?"

"No," she reassured him. "Allah grant that she never will be—to you."

"Tell her for me she will wed no other, for she has taken the blood of my heart, and——"

"No, no," exclaimed Bohayan. "Never will I take a message to her. And I pray you, let her be."

Pogaree smiled wanly. Let her be! Old Bohayan might as well have tried to stop the beating of his heart. Upon pressing her for reasons, she refused to commit herself, for the fear of old Qudrat had been lifelong with her, and so, densely, he again attributed her antipathy to Pajuda as a mother's jealousy. The next day found him again at the market-place in search of Pajuda.

SHE was nowhere to be seen. His heart fell. Then a slip of a girl whispered something in his ear. Stifling a cry of gladness, he strode down to the beach, coming upon her there in a quiet, secluded spot from which all sound seemed banished save the droning wash of the sea.

In modeling the Moros, Nature shaped their features in grotesque lines. But occasionally, as though in pity for the blight, Nature endows some girl among them with attributes that even an American would deem passing fair. To Pogaree, looking out of a Moro's eyes, she was wondrous beyond comparison. Her deep-stained lips, her great eyes, her flooding black hair rippling over her shoulders—all these fitted into a composite picture to grip at his heart.

He walked quickly toward her, reaching out with eager hands.

"Pajuda!" he breathed.

"Yes?"

The glow faded, and teasing laughter came into her eyes instead. She eluded his arms.

Pogaree halted. His eyes went hot, seeing which the girl's smile died in a delicious little thrill of fear.

A sudden swoop of his arms caught her to him, till she stood on tiptoe, crushed against his breast. His eyes closed in ecstasy. His lips rained kisses on the soft hair, the silken lids, the red lips.

"Pajuda!" he gasped, his Malay heart afire.

"Yes?"

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"To-night, when the caravan leaves, you will remain here. We will then go to the priest."

But she arched her eyebrows at this mandatory statement.

"To the priest? To a Christian priest?"

"To any priest, for that matter. But here in this cotta, for my life is cast here now."

"You but think so," smiling slowly. "You can not stay."

"Why?"

"Because you are a Moro. You always will be. And——"

"I want you?" voicing her unspoken thought. "Yes," hungrily, "I want you, beloved. I have you, too."

"Yes?"

Her eyes, Nile-like and Oriental, opened wide and smiled into his soul. She kissed him lightly, teasingly, lingeringly, then, before he could prevent it, slipped from his laxed arms.

"You have me a moment," she whispered, "but you can never have me here."

"You mean?"

"That you are a Mohammedan and must come back to your people if you want me."

"You mean to go back to *that?*"

For a second she thought to tell him of his father's resolution to place him by his side should he return. But instead she teased further.

"To that," she nodded.

"Never!" he retorted.

He drew himself erect. But, with her so near him, his resolution was short lived and, yielding, Pogaree almost lost the love he had roused in her heart. For Pajuda, ready to do almost anything to escape marriage with the old Dato Qudrat, had readily accepted the condition imposed—namely, to lure Pogaree home. But, in the alluring, she had come to love this lad whose likeness the Moro race had not produced in many moons, albeit it was tinged now with contempt as he weakly faltered in his resolve for want of her.

IV

THAT night Pogaree left Iligan and all things Christian behind him. The caravan had taken the open trail, but, for safety's sake, he eluded the new garrisons on the way, traveling by circuitous routes. Up, and ever up, he wended, through forests, past waterfalls, through plains choked with cogan grass, till the waning of the next day found him in sight of his father's village.

This lay on a butte near Lake Lanao. Surrounded by farms, it rose against the sky like some bleak island jutting from a black sea, while behind it, rimming the hazy distances of the plains, lay the endless, murky mountains. A view from its top included great miles of silence and gloom and jungle.

As Pogaree sighted it, the western hills were just swallowing the setting sun, a great red rim whose slanting rays brought out the outlines of the village shacks until they became so many black silhouettes, cameo-clear against the far-off background. But when he reached the top the sun had disappeared, and the twilight, heralding the purple mists of evening, had commenced to blot out all but the nearest objects with a dusky hand.

It was a savage scene into which he stepped. Before the first row of straggling nipa shacks lay a clearing in which the villagers were wont to foregather in the evening, there to tell tales of the trail or indulge in games of salincan. A fire burned there now. Its rays danced grotesquely against the walls of the near-by shacks and revealed the group scattered about, hill-fashion, on their haunches.

After the march of the caravan, they were evidently tired, for their gutteral conversation ran in monotones and no games were in progress at the moment. All were contentedly chewing betel-nut. Some were wrapping bolo-scabbards with tough fiber thongs. Others rubbed at the brass boxes they used to carry betel-nut, called cushros. A sword-smith worked on a bolo near-by, scrolling the blade with intricate lines. He used a hammer and a punch in the operation and once, missing the tool, he raised a cackle from the group as he placed his fish-stained fingers quickly to his mouth.

Pogaree stood in the shadows for an instant, watching. His breast rose and fell softly. After all, this was his home. The heavy tones of the black-toothed tribesmen droning in unison with the melodious tom-toms from the farm, the gurgle of the river skirting the butte, the soft sough of the betel-palms bending pliably to the gentle breeze—all these merged into a melody that touched his heart-strings with

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answering chords. Even the vampires floating overhead added a homelike touch to it all—for him—for so they had flown over him year in and year out, since a boy, since the time he had balanced his first small coconut. And now, though he had hated it for years, his heart warmed to it anew, for, even if he had to trudge on the trails by day, would he not have his wife Pajuda in the evenings?

Finally, he stepped forward. But he kept the fire between himself and his father's shack. The talk ceased upon sight of him, then broke out afresh. He stopped it with a half-pleading, half-peremptory wave of the hand. For a self-conscious flush mantled his face. He had broken from bondage, swearing never to return, yet here he stood once more, experiencing all the dreads of a prodigal son. He could not face his father as yet. So, for an instant, he would wait there by the fire, until his heart stopped fluttering.

FROM one of the shacks came a voice that to him sounded like the notes of a flute. He turned his head toward it and saw Pajuda step forward toward the fire, a stately, serene Moro princess in all her regal attire. Her face lit as she addressed a remark to Nambli over her shoulder—then her eyes fell on Pogaree.

His vocal chords had been constricted at sight of her, but hers now seemed affected as well. The glow came into her eyes, this time a deep, prideful glow, for this tense-faced, eager, reliant man who stood before her now was not Pogaree the plodder, Pogaree the pliable. A strong personality had risen in the ascendency over hers.

True, she had swayed him, but even as he stood before her in acknowledgment of his weakness, there showed in his eyes the indomitable blood of his father, which, having been aroused, would now brook no denial. She dropped her eyes and laid her hand in his outstretched palm.

"Pajuda," he said quietly, "I have come back."

"Yes," she whispered, "you have come back."

"Nambli," said Pogaree, a new authority in his tone, "has Allah cut off your tongue?"

Nambli produced a skilful smile.

"No, prince. My tongue was but tied with pardonable surprise."

As Wohyo, daughter of old Bohayan, joined the group, Pajuda clung closer to Pogaree's hand, though, woman-like, she could scarce restrain the smile of triumph as she took in her would-be rival. But as her eyes left Wohyo, they fell upon Bohayan gazing malevolently at her from a distant casa. Something in the gaze caused her to shudder.

"Have you seen your father?" she asked Pogaree.

"No," he said. "But I shall soon. To-day the son of Qudrat comes back from the taint of the Christian, and so," he tossed his hat in the fire, "and again so," he ripped the shirt from his back and tossed it after the cap, "so does Pogaree, the son of Qudrat, stand forth a new man. Come," again taking Pajuda's hand, "the weakness has gone from my knees. Let us go before him."

Pajuda moved with a thrill of pride to obey this bronze giant who led her—but a strange apparition had come into the group and, at the sight, silence fell on them like a stroke.

IT WAS Bohayan—but what a Bohayan! The mystery and the pent-up passions of the ages glinted in her mesmeric, fathomless, piercing eyes. Her face had taken the hues of the vampires floating above and many swore that no vampire's claws were sharper than Bohayan's that night.

"Listen!" she crooned, and forthwith began a weird chant that, though scarce above a whisper, tolled in their ears like the ringing bell of death.

At the first sound Pajuda shrank affrightedly against Pogaree's arm. Nambli, too, seemed rooted to the spot. Pogaree opened his lips to curse. Puzzled, he started toward Bohayan—and stopped at one glance from those awful eyes. On the face of Wohyo appeared a hateful look of understanding, though she, too, shrank from her transformed mother.

Pogaree watched wonderingly while Bohayan swayed in a half-crouch before the girl, her old legs bent, her body teetering on the balls of her feet, like an old Southern mammie's. What was the meaning of her actions, of this mesmeric chant? He glanced uneasily from face to face, saw emotion written strong on the features of Nambli and Wohyo, then stopped as his gaze fell

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on Pajuda. Horror, repugnance and fear lay naked in her face as well, while her great eyes, protruding painfully, seemed unable to leave those hypnotic orbs before her.

As though drawn by a magnet, old Qudrat had slipped from his casa and now came up behind the group, looking sternly, inquiringly, from face to face.

Then Bohayan spoke out.

"Does that face need words?" staring fixedly at Pajuda.

"You speak in riddles," said the troubled Qudrat. "Out with it."

Bohayan's eyes never left the girl's.

"Long have I doubted her," she said. "Long have I doubted this woman who dares to wed with Pogaree, son of Qudrat. Look at yon Nambli who, desiring her, played the snake in his sire's bosom. At first I had but doubts. But a week gone, what did I see in the shadows there by the bohuka trees? Speak, Nambli!"

Nambli's tongue worked over his dry lips. He darted an agonized look at Wohyo, but he could master no words.

"And you, Pajuda? Ah! She can not speak. But does her face need words?" Bohayan repeated.

Apparently it needed none. The girl's senses seemed powerless under the spell of the hag. She, too, tried to speak in denial, but her only effort was an agonized look of appeal toward Pogaree.

Unluckily, Pogaree was gazing at Nambli, upon whose face guilt of some sort was written; and he did not see the truth written in Pajuda's eyes. Like the break before the storm, the air was heavy for a fractional instant with surcharged impendencies, of glances meeting glances like rapiers, of questions mutely asked, of some answers reluctantly given.

One second thus—then Qudrat, grown young and giant-like in rage, leaped to the casa for his bolo to finish this girl who had misled his son and played fast and loose, apparently, while Pogaree, with a growl like an uncouth beast, lunged at the fleeing Nambli.

The action broke Bohayan's spell over Pajuda. Screaming once, she ran into the night after Pogaree, just as Qudrat emerged from the casa with his kris in hand. Seeing he might overtake her, a new factor sprang into the crisis, for Wohyo seized him round the knees and shrieked,

"No, no. If you must kill, let it be me. It was I Bohayan saw, not Pajuda!"

Qudrat paused, his face a grotesque mask of rage, suspicion and astonishment.

"Shades of Allah, what new thing is this?" he cried.

"Do not listen to her, sire," wailed Bohayan. "She knows not what she is saying."

"Silence! Speak, girl, and speak true."

Then the wretched Wohyo told all. Despairing of Pogaree, she had accepted the advances of the roué Nambli and, hoping against hope that it might turn Pogaree to her, had kept quiet when her mother disclosed her intention of exposing Pajuda. She had merely taken advantage of her mother's mistake in the darkness and let things go on.

"So, sire, if you must kill, kill me. I do not care now. Whom Allah has joined I can not put apart."

Qudrat rubbed his head in perplexity. He walked nervously back and forth, cursing till his breath was spent.

"Shades of Allah," he muttered, "where women come in, there brews the broth of hell. Get up," he roared at a dozen of his men. "Get up and go after them. If harm comes to either of the two, every man goes to the stake. Allah alone knows the outcome of this. And you," turning to the two women, "will suffer the same sentence should harm come to my son."

V

THE men he sent out, save one, did not come upon Pogaree that night nor ever afterward, for that matter. But a Spanish patrol came upon the end of the chase near the town of Maol, now extinct, on the old Spanish trail to Iligan. Even the Spanish shuddered. Expecting resistance, they advanced warily as they saw the frenzied giant pick up the hulk of Nambli and throw it far out into the valley of the Lenamon as one would a sack.

But, strangely, he offered no resistance, walking along in their custody as one in a trance. This the one slave of Qudrat saw, though he failed to see Pajuda, and when he reported the size of the patrol to his comrades, they immediately made plans to flee in a banca to the South Seas, preferring to take chances on the open main rather

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than face the anger of Qudrat. But the one, having more temerity, returned to Qudrat to report that the deserter, Pogaree, had been caught by the Spanish and was being taken to Iligan for the inevitable execution.

The patrol, halting that night below Maol, went into camp just off the trail. A sergeant was in command, and the day's march had been long before taking Pogaree. They would camp in the grass till the cool of the morning and then get into Iligan in time for the *Magellan*, which would no doubt have mail from the beloved Barcelona and Madrid. That subject interested them more than the apathetic ladrone they were guarding.

Pouf! Though powerful as a *caballo*, he had evidently gone *loco* during his rage and did not even offer a move when they shoved him around. *Bueno! Uno* sentinel would be enough. Give us *la cigarette*, Francesco—and how long since that last mail-boat arrived?

They left him tied near the edge of the ring around the fire, alone with his thoughts. When the rest had gone to sleep, leaving the one sentry seated and nodding over his gun, it is quite possible that Pogaree might have noiselessly worked loose from his bonds. But his heart was gone. To die was easy enough—he had killed his enemy—and, as for living, that was unbearable, with Pajuda worse than dead. So he dozed off again and again, to the sputtering of the dying fire.

A grunting noise came from the bush. The sentry stirred and listened. The noise was repeated. Noting that Pogaree and the rest were asleep, the sentry rose carefully and pushed as carefully into the undergrowth. The grunting receded a distance, then veered to the right.

Scenting a wild hog browsing and having visions of a savory breakfast of fresh meat, the Spaniard crept near, rifle extended. The grunting had now ceased and he sought to pierce the gloom of the bushes with puzzled eyes. Before he could straighten, a heavy dagger struck deep into his neck from behind. He sank with but one low cough.

Now a hand reached out and shook Pogaree gently. He gazed stupidly into the face of Pajuda.

"Hurry," she whispered, with her heart threatening to break bondage, as she cut at his ropes.

"Nambli sleeps back there," he whispered back dully. "Go join him."

For answer the girl bent low over him, so that the faint rays of the fire fell on her features. They were transformed, grown wondrous in the abandon of sacrifice and pleading.

"I will have you know the truth," she whispered fiercely, "even if the infidels waken to find me here. I loathed him. Look deep in my eyes, beloved. If I could not speak then, let Allah and my heart speak for me now."

WHAT Pogaree saw in her eyes remolded him into the son of Qudrat. He seized the dagger, slit the remaining cords, came erect silently and slipped with his bride-to-be into the forest.

"Into the river valley," he whispered, taking the sentry's gun. "We will lay there through the next sun and then——"

"And then," against his lips, "and then to father Bantao in the Cotta Bato."

When the patrol awoke to find their gory comrade, they looked in startled amaze into each other's eyes. When they arrived at Iligan they reported to Colonel Don Cortijo that a hundred ladrones had attacked them from the bush, killing one and taking the prisoner with them in the mêlée. But the honor of Spain had been upheld in the long and bitter contest, for at least fifty Moros had been fittingly laid away in the Lenamon valley!

Thus did the sergeant explain the loss of his prisoner.

COLONEL CORTIJO, smiling complacently over a bottle of wine just brought in from Madrid on the *Magellan*, extended his plans for the morrow's march against the hostile Dato Munay. He would stop on his way and teach a much-needed lesson to Dato Qudrat and Dato Momungun, thus being sure to catch whoever's men had perpetrated the deed.

The next morning Colonel Cortijo's command left Iligan; a well-ordered regiment, wheeling and interwheeling symmetrically in column. Behind them the Master Hand had painted a scene as if in recognizance of this to-be-historic morning, for black clouds hung in the sky to the west, fading gradually from inky, shining ebony to softer-toned

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purple and blue at the outer edges. The mountains jutted up from the rim of the bay, blurred and indistinct, their tops lost in the nebulous blackness above. Hanging over them was the full moon—a silvery, softly radiant moon banked on all sides by solid, metallic black. Not a ray lightened the surrounding background—an ebony frame. Reaching straight out across the waters came a dancing, froth-whipped path of purple and silver, clear-cut as crystal upon the morning sea, transforming everything it touched. It retouched the sinister stone fort, the sloping beach, the beached bancas, the palms, whose tops dipped now up, now down. When the last set of fours crossed the river ford, the moon-path lingered on the gallant column in one last caress.

At the point where they crossed the river the plains are broad and flat, but the trail, leading toward the crotch in the hills where the ascent began, runs through ever-narrowing confines. The forest-bearded hills here appear as though a great ship's prow had been thrust against the hills when the strata were hot. The marching columns, nearing the apex, were close beset by steep slopes that rose on either side to considerable height.

SUDDENLY the regiment halted. A tremor ran through them. Then, with but little warning, the hills vomited a host of Moros. They came from everywhere—from the trees, from the shrubs, from the gullies and from the rocks, screeching, bellowing, slashing, pouring over the Spanish like a deluge from the pits. The Spanish trembled, bellied, threatened to break, then stiffened and met them breast to breast.

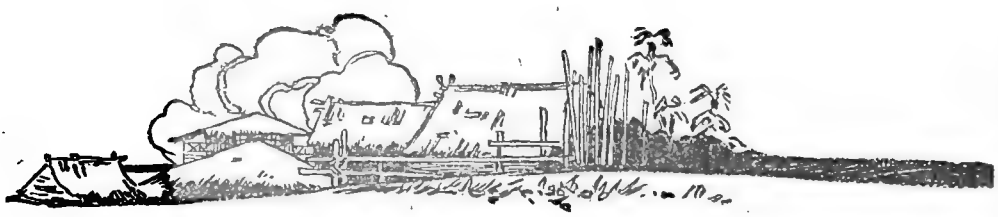
Seven hundred men they were, and bold. Seven hundred men from the north of Spain, where the blood is still knightly and pride is predominant. They stood back to back, hampered by bedding-rolls, hampered by their close formation, hampered by that very stubborness that whipped Braddock long ago. It was very foolish, but very brave.

They never backed a step. And as the Spanish fell in heroic lanes, the din of the Moros' cries rose up against the skies, growing ever more lustful, ever stronger, until at last they who had been seven hundred heroes in the flesh lay cold and gory under the morning moon.

But above all that din, shivering even the spines of the hillmen, rang one continuous, maniac cry. All through the fight old Dato Qudrat sat high on the hillside, beating his breast on the spot where that one great love for his supposedly dead boy had softened his otherwise carrion soul. Under his grief, his queer old brain had warped and twisted so that his voice wrought appalling notes as he wailed and wailed and wailed. Growing higher and higher, it predominated over the others' gloating yells. And to that tune those Spaniards who had presumably killed his son went fighting down to death.

Of this Pogaree did not know until long after. Ignorant of the impending fight, he had gone to the Cotta Bato valley to join the retinue of Dato Bantao until such time as he could get into favorable communication with his father. For him a new life-story had opened and he whispered often against the lips of his bride, "Allah is good!"

But the natives at Iligan shun the spot at night. This is not due entirely to the superstitious fear of the grass-grown graves that stud the gorge. They fear to awaken that cry at whose mention they cross themselves—the wail of the Pogaree.



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The Master Cracksman

Stephen Allen Reynolds

"WHAT are you up to, Parr? Taking a course in electrical engineering?" I asked the head of the International Bureau of Investigation as I entered his private office and found him deeply engrossed in an electrical text-book.

"No, Clarke," answered the man-hunter, as he brushed a pile of blue-prints from a chair to the floor and motioned for me to sit down. "I'm simply reading up on electrical matters. It may help me to solve one of the blindest, most complicated, tantalizing problems that have ever been put up to me. What do you think of a cracksman who beats the Thomas electric protective method, rips open a steel vault and then makes his getaway empty-handed, leaving behind him hundreds of thousands of dollars—much of it in bank-notes of large denomination which he could have readily slipped into his pockets?"

"He might have been scared away before he had time to load up," I ventured.

Parr shook his head. "That won't do," said he. "He always takes away his tools with him. Furthermore, reports show that he has entered four different banks within the past four weeks, but as yet hasn't taken a penny."

"It sounds as if it might be the actions of a crazy burglar."

"If he is crazy, there's certainly a method to his madness," Parr resumed. "Each of these jobs was done on a Sunday night. He's a top-notcher, too; knows every branch of his trade. For instance, he used a 'putty-well' and nitroglycerin for the first job—regular yegg fashion. He used lag-screws and graduated wedges for the second and third breaks—a different method for all three, according to the structure of the vault he was working on. His last stunt was to tap an arc-light circuit and connect it up with an electrode. With this he melted a neat little hole through the vault door in a Bridgeport bank. The hole was just large enough to enable him to slip his arm through so that he could throw the bolts. He must be an expert electrician, for it takes a lot of nerve and skill to tap an alternating current of high voltage, to say nothing of beating the electrical protective device.

"The Bankers' Protective Association have had their men on the cases for nearly a month. These men have been baffled at every turn. They say that there are only two men in the country who can do such clean work; that one of them, 'Red' Hogan, is finishing up a long term in San Quentin; while the other, 'Frenchy' Norris, is in Moyamensing for life. The man who did these four jobs is a new one, but he's certainly a crackerjack cracksman, unknown to the police.

"The Thomas protective concern is wild on account of the way this fellow has been giving their 'burglar-proof' protective device the laugh. Up until these recent breaks, the Thomas protective method has never been beaten; but for the past few weeks the company has been spending money like water to keep things quiet. They fear the effect of publicity on the market value of their stock; and since

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they've learned that the Bankers' Association has called me in, they've offered me a bonus of $10,000 if I catch the cracksman and inform them in what manner he 'got by' their system."

I pondered as Parr ceased speaking. "What manner of man," I asked myself, "could this one be? A man who ripped open 'thief-proof' vaults, and laughed at 'burglar-proof' electric systems; *yet a man who stole nothing!*"

"HERE are some data relating to the cases," said Parr, as he handed me a large sheet of paper covered with typewriting. "Read this over while I do a bit of thinking; then, if you feel so disposed, you might take a run over to Bridgeport with me and we'll have a look at the last break of this master cracksman."

Parr lit one of his black *Perfecto Excepcionales*, turned to the window at his elbow and gazed moodily at the serrated sky-line of lower Manhattan, while I gave my attention to the typewritten data. It ran as follows:

CASE NO. 1

SHOE AND LEATHER BANK, BROCKTON, MASS., entered during the night of Sunday, September 4th. No watchman. Outside window jimmied. Dial-knob of main door of vault knocked off, probably with leaden hammer, and nitroglycerin introduced by putty-well method. (Bits of putty found lying around.) Cashier found wooden door of protective system shut as usual. Steel door shut also, but lock shattered. Electric system tested and found to be in working order as shown by repeated tests. Policemen on reserve duty were playing pinochle all Sunday night in a room at headquarters where electric alarm-bell was located. They are positive not only that the alarm was not sounded during the night, but that the clock gave the O. K. signal on the small bell every few minutes as usual. Vault contained $62,500 in coin and bank-notes, but nothing was taken. No report from any one as to the explosion. Bank fronts on side street in center of a business block.

CASE NO. 2

BAY STATE TRUST COMPANY, QUINCY, MASS., entered night of Sunday, September 11th. Bank, relying upon Thomas Electric Protective Company's system, employed no watchman. Back ripped from old-style vault by means of lag-screws and interior of vault exposed. Bank-notes, gold and silver coin in sacks, and securities in plain view, but nothing was disturbed. Police chief in room at headquarters where alarm-clock was located, and is positive that no alarm was sounded. Electric method tested and found to be in perfect working order. Family living over bank heard nothing unusual. Side window overlooking an alley-way was jimmied first.

CASE NO. 3

FIRST NATIONAL BANK, NEW LONDON, CONN., had outside door forced during night of Sunday, September 18th. In spite of electric protective apparatus, the side panel of laminated construction was forced off large Ball safe. Marks indicate that graduated wedges were used. All bank-notes, securities and currency were found intact. Electric alarm-clock located in all-night office of telegraph company. Night manager on duty is positive that no alarm was sounded. Protective system tested by expert employees of the Thomas Company, and pronounced to be in good order. The night was fair and calm. No tools or other clues.

CASE NO. 4

MANUFACTURERS' BANK, BRIDGEPORT, CONN. Night of Sunday, September 25th, circle of glass was cut out of pane in window looking out over alley and fastening was slipped back. The cracksman ignored or "fixed" the electric protective apparatus and opened the wooden outer casing of vault. New yegg-proof Ball-Clay safe. Cracksman tapped arc-light circuit running through adjoining room and melted a five-inch hole through main door of vault. Arc-light wires were spliced in workmanlike fashion. Doors of vault were found wide open in the morning, but door of protective system was found shut. Notes and currency aggregating $185,000 (on hand for end-of-month pay-rolls) were not touched. Night was foggy; no wind. Eleven employees on duty at electric-light plant are positive that no one but an electrical engineer could have cut into their circuit that night without their knowledge. Electric alarm at police-headquarters gave no warning. Electric device tested and reported O. K.

"What do you make of it, Clarke?" asked Parr, as I finished reading of the remarkable breaks.

"It's the strangest series of events I've ever heard of," I replied. "What possible object could a person have in breaking into a bank unless he intended to rob it?"

"That's what I'm going to find out," drawled Parr. Picking up a desk calendar, he went on, "According to his schedule of working every Sunday night, there's a break due this coming Sunday. The question is—'Where?' Fortunately to-day is Thursday. That gives me three full days to look into the matter."

With these words the man-hunter laid aside the calendar and proceeded to look up the Bridgeport trains.

II

"IT'S most extraordinary, Mr. Parr," observed Whitman, the cashier of the Bridgeport bank, after he had shown us the damaged vault and the spliced wires. "I can't imagine what on

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earth would lead a man to risk his life and liberty by cracking a vault and then going away empty-handed. He might have taken fully $100,000 away with him in a couple of hand-satchels—to say nothing of small bills and gold coin. Then there's the mystery of his beating the electric appliance."

"Have you ever heard of a case where the Thomas system failed to give the alarm?" Parr asked.

"Not until this series of incidents; although every now and then we hear of some expert electrician who boasts that he can beat it. I've read in the *Bankers' Monthly* that the Thomas Protective people put one of their devices into an electrical exposition and challenged any electrician in the world to open the case without giving an alarm. They offered a substantial sum of money to any one who could do this. A number of electricians tried, but all failed. Judging by these recent breaks, however, somebody has found a way to get around it."

"What communications have passed between your officers and the Thomas concern recently?"

"We notified the Bankers' Protective Association Monday morning. That same evening we received a wire from the Thomas Company's president guaranteeing to reimburse us for damages to the vault upon the sole condition that we keep the matter out of the papers. Naturally, we have no desire to precipitate a run on the bank, so we've not taken the public into our confidence, and expect the Thomas Company to make good."

"Have you had any strange visitors lately?—noticed any suspicious characters prowling around the premises?" Parr asked as the cashier paused.

"Not for two months or so, since an old chap came in here one day and tried to pester me into buying some crazy attachment for the vault. When I come to think of it now, he claimed that the Thomas system had one weak point, and that as soon as the crooks found it, numerous robberies would occur."

"Tell me all you know of this man—every circumstance attending his visit."

Parr's voice was incisive. In spite of his usual calmness, he leaned forward in his chair and waited somewhat impatiently for the cashier to proceed.

Whitman turned back the leaves upon a calendar which hung near-by him. "I'll try to fix the exact date," he explained, as he paused at the leaf for July.

"I have it!" he declared, after a few moments. "Fortunately, the day this man called I recollect as one of the busiest half-days we've had this year. It was during the forenoon of Saturday, July the second. I distinctly recall a long line of depositors at the paying-teller's window when he went away. The Fourth falling upon a Monday, these customers were withdrawing small sums to carry them over the double holiday."

The detective drummed upon the polished surface of the director's table. Plainly he was anxious to have the cashier get to the point, yet hated to interrupt him lest some seemingly unimportant detail be lost in the telling.

"This old fellow came in and started a rambling statement about the Thomas system," continued Whitman. "He went into a long technical explanation of its weak point and wound up by offering to demonstrate a patented clock of his own invention which he claimed would make the system actually burglar-proof. He was rather shabby, and I put him down as one of these perpetual-motion cranks. His talk was a sort of a rambling discourse on electricity, voltage, resistance, and so on.

"It was a very busy half-day—as I've said—and I didn't waste much time on him. I got rid of him as quickly as possible without actually being rude to him. When I told him that we were perfectly satisfied with the Thomas device as it was, he pocketed his disappointment and bowed himself out."

"What was his name?" demanded Parr, as the other paused.

The cashier thought for a moment or two. "Can't recollect exactly," he admitted. "He didn't leave his card. As nearly as I can remember it, the name was 'Hatch,' or 'Bache'—something like that. Neither do I know his address. I wasn't greatly interested in him."

"Describe him," Parr directed.

"I should say that he was about fifty-five or a little older. He was rather pale and nervous; had light-blue eyes, a snow-white mustache and iron-gray hair. His clothing was neat, but well-worn. His linen was neat, but his hands were rough and

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stained, like those of a mechanic or a laborer. His manners, though, were those of a gentleman, and he was unquestionably an American, if I am any judge. I've never seen or heard of him, before or since."

Parr arose from his chair. "I'd like to use your long-distance phone," said he. "I want to talk with the other banks."

"Help yourself," said Whitman, as he indicated a booth in one corner of the directors' room.

ENTERING the booth, the detective seated himself upon a stool and closed the sound-proof door. For fully three-quarters of an hour he remained in the unventilated interior of the booth, while I chatted with Whitman.

"We've got to get back to town as quickly as possible," were Parr's first words as he emerged from the booth and wiped his forehead.

"What do you make of it?" I asked, after we had taken our leave of the bank officials and seated ourselves in a depot trap which had been placed at our disposal.

"It's all pretty muddy as yet," answered Parr. "However, I've got a pretty strong hunch that we'll run across Mr. Master Cracksman on one of his Sunday-night expeditions."

"Do you think the old crank is connected with the breaks?" I asked as we boarded an express train for the city.

"I can answer that question a great deal better to-morrow afternoon," Parr answered.

Once in the smoking compartment of the rear Pullman I tried to draw my friend out, but during the ride to New York he remained uncommunicative in so far as the unknown cracksman was concerned.

Once at the Grand Central, we taxied to the headquarters of the International Bureau, where Parr found his night operative on duty.

"Get that multigraph inked up, my man, and be quick about it," were Parr's first words to the detective-clerk. "I want you to take a circular night-letter to every bank of importance within a radius of two hundred miles. And I want them addressed and handed in at the telegraph office before midnight."

After checking off several hundred addresses in a bankers' directory, Parr wrote his circular message upon the sheet of waxed stencil-paper.

"See that each one of these checked banks gets a message," were his final instructions to the clerk. "I'm off to Washington on the midnight; address, the New Willard; back at four to-morrow afternoon."

"Come on, Clarke," he went on, turning to me; "we've just time enough for a late dinner and an hour at billiards before train-time."

After a fair dinner at our club, we played billiards for an hour. Parr was in rare form, and in a talkative mood—for him. Unable to accompany my friend to Washington on account of a personal engagement for the following forenoon, yet curious to ascertain what he expected to learn at the national capital, I was eager to discuss the mysterious bank cases with him, but he adroitly turned the conversation into other channels.

"If I incessantly talked shop during my waking hours, I'd soon be dreaming shop," he declared laughingly, while making a brilliant run of thirty points. "In that case it would only be a question of time before my mental machinery would be ready for the scrap-heap."

III

THE following afternoon, shortly before five o'clock, I joined the man-hunter at the city offices of the Thomas Electric Protective Company. Parr had telephoned me at the club, immediately upon his arrival from Washington.

"I'm going to have a little fun," he said to me in an aside, as we were waiting in the outer reception-room, while an office-boy disappeared with his card.

"What did you learn in Washington?" I returned. A grim expression, familiar to me, belied his proposed "fun."

"Wait and listen," were my instructions, given just as the boy returned and invited us to follow him.

"Just got your message, Mr. Parr," began the thick-set, rheumy president of the Thomas Company when we were ushered into his presence. "Was just on the point of leaving for the day."

So saying, he waved us to seats, and then looked sharply at me.

"This is my friend and confidant, Mr. Bruce Clarke," Parr informed him in anticipation of a question as to my identity.

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"We can talk quite freely and confidentially before Clarke," he continued. "Besides, I may need him as a witness before we're through."

"What are you driving at?" asked Thomas, nervously fingering a diamond solitaire upon one of his pudgy fingers.

"I mean that we're going to get down to brass tacks," Parr replied. "If I'm going to help you, you've got to be frank with me. Your company is capitalized at two millions of dollars, is it not?"

"It is; and my protective method is worthy of it."

"Would you object to describing the method briefly?"

"Not at all. There's nothing secret about it, and it's covered by patents. To begin with, we take three immense sheets of heavy tin-foil—an excellent conductor of electricity—and cover both sides of them with a heavy coating of shellac—a non-conductor. These sheets are then laid together and sandwiched between hardwood casings cut to the size of one of the sides of the safe to be protected. A separate casing is made for the back, front, bottom, top and sides of the safe. At each joint the sheets of tin-foil are connected with each other by fine copper wire.

"The main wires run out of the building to the alarm-clock, usually set up in police headquarters. There is a door in the front of my casings, so arranged that when the bank closes for the day, and this door is shut, an electric circuit is opened automatically. As long as this circuit is open, a small bell in the alarm-clock rings every five minutes. Nobody can tamper with the safe without first opening the door or tearing off a part of the casement. This closes the circuit and rings the large alarm-bell at police headquarters.

"Should a burglar attempt to bore even a small hole through the outer casing, his drill closes the circuit as soon as it pierces the second sheet of tinfoil. It's a perfect system, Mr. Parr. Why, last year, at Dallas, Texas, an alarm was sounded at police headquarters which caused the officers to hurry to a bank protected by my method. No burglars were found, but, after a thorough investigation, it was learned that a mischievous boy had discharged an air-gun through the barred window of the bank. The leaden pellet penetrated the first coat of shellac, thus closing the circuit and ringing the alarm. It's a perfect system—a wonderful invention."

"Then you still insist that it's a perfect system in spite of the four breaks which have just occurred—to say nothing of those to follow?" Parr smiled as he spoke, but there was a sarcastic note in his voice which told me that these men were not to be friends.

"But, Mr. Parr, I can't imagine how my——"

"THERE'S no use, Thomas," broke in the man-hunter. "You might as well stop beating around the bush, for I've just returned from Washington where I had a long talk with an old friend—the chief examiner of the Patent Office. He knows the inner history of your patent as well as you do—probably better. Now answer me: Isn't it true that you know—and have known for the past few years—that your protective method is *not* burglar-proof?"

The head of the Thomas Company was plainly embarrassed. He toyed with a paper-weight upon his flat-topped desk and eyed me sheepishly.

"Speak right up," Parr insisted. "You needn't be afraid of Clarke. He's not a newspaper reporter; and you need fear nothing as long as you do the right thing. Is it true, or not?"

"It's true," admitted Thomas, in a barely audible whisper.

"Now listen further," Parr went on. "Some twenty-five years ago you bought the basic rights to your patent from the inventor, Robert Thatcher. You paid him five thousand dollars for all his rights in it. You then formed a stock company, but retained fifty-one per cent. of the stock yourself. To-day, nearly every bank and pawnbroker in the country is paying tribute to your company; and you, personally, have made nearly a million for yourself. Am I right?"

President Thomas nodded in affirmation, dropped the paper-weight and began twirling his ring again.

"Meanwhile, Thatcher married," resumed Parr. "Then he lost his wife and had a long run of hard luck. He appealed to you several times for a loan, but you refused him. About three years ago he applied to you for capital with which to per-

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fect an improvement upon your system. But you put him off, after trying to worm his secret out of him. He managed to struggle along with a little machine-shop in a Connecticut town, however, without your aid, and in due time perfected and patented a device which makes the Thomas system actually a burglar-proof one. He then called upon you and demonstrated how your system could be beaten. He offered to sell you this improvement, but you couldn't agree upon a price.

"About this time your advertising manager conceived a plan for quieting a rumor in banking circles to the effect that a way had been found to beat the Thomas device. A safe, protected by one of your casings, was set up at an electrical exposition, and ten thousand dollars in gold was offered to the expert who could lay his finger upon the naked steel of the safe without having rung the alarm-bell. First, however, you had obtained Thatcher's promise to keep away from the exposition, with the understanding that you would buy his improvement at a fair price upon a certain date. Your system withstood every test and your business with furriers and jewelers increased.

"The day arrived for your settlement with Thatcher. He lowered his price somewhat, but you persisted in offering him a trifling sum for his valuable attachment. He refused, and left your office, discouraged and disappointed. He returned to Connecticut and completed several of his improved clocks. Independent of you, he sold and installed these in various banks, but, as he was obliged to make use of certain features covered by your patents, you served injunctions upon him and had his devices thrown out almost as fast as he could sell them. You were enabled to do this with the money made out of the original creation of Thatcher's brain. Now, some one——"

"But Thatcher wanted fifty thousand dollars for his little machine," whined Thomas.

"I was saying that some one has discovered the weak point of your system," Parr went on, ignoring the interruption. "They've started the ball rolling by breaking into these four banks. Anonymous communications have already reached several newspapers to the effect that certain banks have been broken into, but I have instructed the officials to deny all knowledge of the breaks as long as I am connected with the case. Should the newspapers verify these reports, they'll devote columns to the mystery and every bank in the country will throw out your system and employ watchmen in its stead."

"WHAT shall I do?" asked the humbled head of the company. He realized that the detective had not exaggerated the situation.

"The right thing!" Parr declared with emphasis. "Execute an agreement to buy Thatcher's improvement from him for fifty thousand dollars. It's worth far more than that, as you well know. I'm going over to my headquarters now, and I'll be there about one hour. You may take this hour to think the matter over; but unless you 'phone me before I leave my office that you are willing to buy Thatcher out at that figure, I'll withdraw from the case. Furthermore, I'll see that the Associated Press gets the story in all its details. Your money and your influence will not muzzle the press of the country—and you know it. Good evening, sir."

Without another word and without so much as a glance in the direction of the crestfallen president, Parr strode out of the office.

"You don't think Thatcher has anything to do with these breaks?" I asked, as we left the elevator and proceeded down the nearly deserted corridor.

"Who knows?" returned Parr. "I wired one of my best men to take the first train for the inventor's home town when I learned his address from the special examiner. Ought to hear from him pretty soon. Connors will stick to him like a burr and keep me posted."

A small stack of letters and telegrams awaited Parr at his headquarters. While he prepared to give his attention to them, I made bold to ask him how it happened that the special examiner knew so much of the inside history of the Thomas-Thatcher affair.

"These Patent-Office people know a great deal more than they are required to put into their annual reports," the detective replied, as he threw a letter into the waste-basket. "Besides," he went on, "the special examiner told me that he had struck up a close friendship with Thatcher,

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and that he's always found him to be a fine, square old fellow."

His immediate task at an end, Parr saved two letters, made a few figures upon a desk-pad and then observed:

"On Friday, July the first, Thatcher called upon the cashier of the New London bank that was broken into. The next day, July the second, he spoke to our friend Whitman of the Bridgeport bank. Upon July the fifth—the next banking day—he tried to demonstrate his machine to the president of the Traders' National Bank in Newark, New Jersey. Therefore, if our unknown friend is following up Thatcher's canvassing route, which seems likely, he's due in Newark day after to-morrow night. It hardly seems likely that a man of Thatcher's caliber would——"

At this juncture, Parr was interrupted by the ringing of his desk telephone. The conversation which ensued was brief, but evidently satisfactory to the detective, for at its termination he turned to me with one of his rare smiles, and remarked:

"Thomas has come to his senses. He's agreed to pay over fifty thousand to Thatcher."

I was on the point of putting a question when there came another interruption, this time in the form of a telegraph messenger.

"From Connors," I heard Parr mutter, after he had ripped open the blue and white envelope and glanced at the signature upon the message within. "Well, I'll be——!" he went on to exclaim, as he mastered the contents of the message.

"What's up?" I asked in amazement. Very rare indeed were Parr's lapses into profanity.

"Simply that Thatcher is not the Master Cracksman that we're looking for," declared the man-hunter. "Connors wires me that Robert Thatcher died July the thirtieth, *more than a month before the first job in Brockton!*"

IV

IGODFREY PARR and I were sitting upon a leather divan in a corner of the cashier's private room in the Traders' National Bank of Newark, patiently awaiting the problematical appearance of the burglar.

Diagonally across the room a doorway afforded us an unobstructed view of the front of the electrically guarded vault. The light from a single electric bulb dimly illumined the outer room in which the vault was situated, but we were in darkness. At Parr's request we had been left alone in the bank and the local police had not been notified. We had chatted in low tones until about midnight and had then enjoyed a final smoke.

From our location, it was impossible to see the clock in the outer room, but I should judge that it must have been about two, and I was nodding, when the detective prodded me into wakefulness. Listening intently I heard a faint scratching sound. Then, as the man-hunter gently squeezed my knee, I heard the tinkle of breaking glass.

I heard a window raised cautiously, a footfall on the linoleum, and the next instant a figure appeared in the circle of light—a figure that moved almost noiselessly. The front of the vault was not visible from the street, so the burglar boldly turned on another light, thus giving us a clearer view of him. He was of medium height and was dressed in a well-worn suit of clothes. An automobile dust-cap with ear-laps and a neck-piece was pulled well down on his face, shielding his features from us.

His first move after turning on the light was to set down a large traveling-bag he carried; his next, to take an instrument out of the bag, together with a pair of pliers. He then removed his coat and rolled up his shirt-sleeves. After a brief study of the wooden casing around the vault, he unerringly located the pair of alarm-wires and traced them to a point where they began to follow the baseboard-molding around the room.

A sudden pull with his pliers disengaged a few feet of the twin wires from the molding. Working rapidly, the cracksman then scraped through the insulating material until he had bared each wire at points about twelve inches apart. He then picked up the instrument I had noticed. It looked like a series of connected spools wound with wire, a single wire dangling from either end. These wires spliced into the alarm-circuit at the naked spots, the intruder then hastily cut both wires leading to the vault.

Another moment and he had jimmied open the door of the Thomas casing and

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was studying the steel door of the vault. Taking what looked to me like a breast-drill from his satchel, the burglar then unscrewed one of the unlighted electric bulbs from its socket and screwed home some attachment in its place. He then brought out a long coil of wire and an oil-can. Connecting the wire with the drill, he switched on the current. A humming noise resulted. Evidently it was an electrically driven drill.

Oil-can and drill in hand, the cracksman approached the door of the vault. He was just on the point of raising the drill, when I heard a faint click beside me, followed by the even voice of the man-hunter.

"Come out o' that, Thatcher. Don't scratch the paint."

Parr's tone was neither high nor low, but he spoke very distinctly. The purring of the drill ceased at his very first word. Machine and oil-can clattered to the floor as the burglar stood erect, with a gasp of surprise.

"Turn on all those lights and then take off that hat," was Parr's next command.

Light after light flashed up as the cracksman obeyed, and to my astonishment the clean-cut features of a young man were revealed, whereon were depicted the mixed emotions of fear, sorrow, defiance—and possibly a touch of pride.

"I suppose it's all up with me now," faltered the young cracksman, as Parr turned on the light over our heads. "But you can't lock me up for robbery," he went on defiantly; "I'm no thief."

"That's quite obvious, Thatcher," said Parr.

"How do you know my name is Thatcher?" asked the other, his curiosity momentarily outweighing his fear.

"WHY—there's a man named Connors who works for me. He spent all day Friday and Saturday poking around in your home town. He learned that Robert Thatcher, the well-known machinist and inventor, died last July. He also learned that the old man left a son, Robert Thatcher, Jr., and that this son had spent two or three years at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he partly finished a course in electrical engineering. This man Connors learned many other things also. Suppose you come in here and sit down. I haven't any warrant for your arrest. You've nothing to be afraid of."

With these words the man-hunter slipped his automatic into an upper vest-pocket and waved the cracksman to a seat upon the leather divan.

Tenderly—yet skilfully—the detective drew the strange story from the inventor's son; a story full of suffering, privation, disappointment and hard work.

"It was dad's diary that spurred me on to try to get even with old man Thomas," declared the young man, after Parr had won his confidence. "I was working in the Thomas Company shops—unknown to the president, of course—when my father was taken ill. He wired for me, but died before I reached him. The expenses of the funeral wiped out about everything.

"I had no thought of revenge until I ran across the diary. In its pages my father wrote of his sacrifices for me—how he had pinched and scraped in order to send me to the Institute. He had even eaten dry bread—— But I can't go into that. It choked me to read of it.

"One entry in particular I will never forget. It ran:

" 'Saw Thomas to-day. He snubbed and insulted me instead of keeping his promise. I tried to speak up for my rights, but he fairly ordered me from his office. The boy will have to come home and go to work. It's hard, for I so wanted him to complete his course and be equipped for life's battle. If there were only some way of bringing Thomas to his knees—some honorable way.'

"That passage choked me—it made me 'see red,' as they say. I didn't dare to trust myself in Thomas's presence. I'd have brained him on sight, I dare say, for I'm hot-tempered. Then it was that I thought of this scheme for getting even with Thomas. I knew the weakness of his system. Working in the Thomas shops since I left the Institute, I knew the devices which had been installed in various banks. I knew that certain banks had purchased casings of a standard size; and I knew the number of ohms of electric resistance a current would encounter in passing through a standard casing. I gave father a list of these banks, so that he could the easier demonstrate his improvement. Knowing the number of ohms of resistance in any particular casing, all one has to do is to wind spools with wire until they offer the

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same amount of resistance. Then it's simply a matter of cutting the spools into the circuit, and cutting the vault, or safe, out.

"My father's clock and rheostat, which automatically changed the resistance every thirty seconds, was the one thing the Thomas system needed to make it burglar proof. No one can beat it. I knew all the methods for cracking safes—made a study of them while I worked with father. They're all very simple, once one gets by the protective casing, if no watchman is around. I decided to break into a bank or two but to steal nothing, in case I was caught. Were the breaks given publicity in the newspapers, I figured that it would not be long before the bankers would decide that the Thomas system was a useless expense—not what it was cracked up to be. With bankers all over the country throwing out his method, Thomas would be touched in a tender spot—his pocket. Then, I thought, I'd make him pay dearly for the improvement.

"My first job was the Brockton one. I had an easy time of it. I squirted a little nitro. around the door-jamb—after cutting out the electric system—covered the vault with rugs, and blew it.

"I might have gotten away safely with a large amount of money, but I didn't touch a penny. I watched the papers for a few days, but saw nothing. The next Sunday night I tackled the Quincy bank and did a lot of damage, I suppose. I ripped off the back panel of the vault after an hour's hard work—then slipped away. I saw no account of it in the papers, so resolved to send them an anonymous tip upon the next occasion.

"Then came the New London National and the Bridgeport bank. I worked Sunday nights because it's the safest night to crack a vault. I sent in unsigned typewritten accounts of the affairs to the newspapers, but why they haven't printed them I don't know, unless the bank people have denied the reports. After the——"

"But how came you to follow your father's canvassing-route?" broke in Parr. "That's why I'm here to-night."

"Because these banks all have standard-size casings," was the reply. "That made it easier for father to demonstrate his clock and also saved me the time and trouble of using a galvanometer to measure the resistance in a strange casing. None of them are burglar-proof, though; it's only a question of a little extra time."

"And what do you think we ought to do with you?" asked the detective.

"I don't know and I don't care," replied the young cracksman. "You'll call in the police, I suppose," he added bitterly.

"NOW look here," said Parr; "there's no use in denying but that this safe-cracking is a bad business. Putting aside the penalty for breaking and entering, trespass and damage, there's the personal risk you've run. It's a wonder that you haven't been shot—shot down in cold blood as if you were a mad cur. Now I've got some good news for you; but this is to be your last job. Thomas has agreed to pay an even fifty thousand dollars for your father's invention. You'd better——"

"I'll rot in jail first!" protested young Thatcher. "That man has made a million dollars at least, while my father has been struggling and starving. It's not the money that I care for, and it's too late to do my father any good, but I wouldn't listen to any proposition less than a hundred thousand in cash and a half interest in the Thomas Company."

"You'd better go slow, young man," said Parr calmly. "No doubt you've been more sinned against than sinning, but the fact remains that you're a criminal in the eyes of the law. Ethically speaking, you're about right in your demands, and I'd like to see you get your own from Thomas. But you've no right to damage the property of these bankers to attain your private ends, and they're my clients. Now, to start in to make amends before we talk any more, I think you'd better fix up that Thomas system so nobody'll notice that the wires have been cut."

"What are you going to do?" I asked Parr, as Thatcher began his task.

"I don't know. I'll have to think a bit."

At this juncture an idea occurred to me. I had both money and leisure. The young fellow's nerve and daring appealed strongly to me.

"Why not back him against Thomas?" I asked myself. Surely a newspaper campaign of publicity directed against the imperfections of the Thomas system would bring President Thomas to his knees.

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"Parr," I said, "if there's any way to get this young fellow off the premises in safety, I'll help him fight his battle. He ought to be given a show."

I had just finished speaking when young Thatcher crossed the room toward us, packed bag in hand. He had replaced the wires and had insulated the bare spots with rubber tape.

"Thatcher," began Parr as he produced a visiting-card, "here's my name and address. I want you to call upon me at my office to-morrow afternoon at three. This gentleman here with me is Mr. Bruce Clarke. He has plenty of money; he likes to see people get even, and he's expressed a desire to help you buck Thomas. He'll be there to-morrow—and I hope you'll win out. All I ask of you is that you'll make good for these damages in the event that Thomas shouldn't. You may do so anonymously if you wish. There's a four-o'clock train through the Tube. You'd better get it."

Impulsively, without a word, but with tears in his eyes, Thatcher grasped our hands in turn and then strode toward the unfastened window.

"Just a moment!" Parr called, as he surveyed a circular hole in the lower window-pane. "When you get outside, if no one's around, just toss a brick or a cobblestone through that lower sash. That hole is altogether too neat."

A few moments later, a heavy stone crashed through the window. Smiling grimly, Parr adjusted the missing electric bulb, and after glancing carefully around the room he switched off all the lights but one.

TWO hours later, as the eastern sky warned us that daybreak was close at hand, a key turned in the outer door of the bank, and the next instant two bank officials, followed by a uniformed policeman, entered the room.

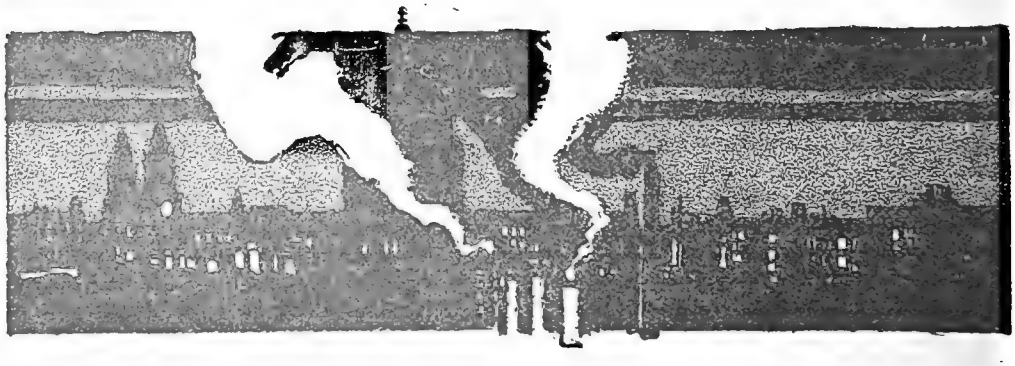
"It's been an awfully stupid night, gentlemen," drawled the man-hunter as he arose from the divan and stretched himself. "I'm afraid that my tip was wrong, and that we've had our trouble for our pains."

"But what's all this?" demanded the policeman as he surveyed the stone and the shattered glass.

"Oh!" Parr lied, "some of your Newark roughnecks insisted on singing just outside the bank. I opened the window and asked them to remove, whereupon they handed in their card. I think I'd recognize the man who threw the stone, should I see him again."

And we both saw him again—many times—for, three months later, after we had Thomas where we wanted him, I proposed the name of Robert Thatcher for membership in our Club. And a year later, finding the two chief stockholders in the new Thatcher-Thomas Company unable to agree, I bought Thomas's holdings at par.

And—quite fittingly and deservedly—Thomas invested his money in Wall Street margins, with the usual result.



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Silver-Shoes

by George S. Reed

SYNOPSIS—Roderick Marley, having killed in a duel a Buckingham retainer, is smuggled out of England, on a ship bound for Jamaica, by his powerful brother, Sir George, to bring back the daughter of Dudley, a Cromwellian general, betrothed when a child to Sir George. Dudley, banished, has taken his daughter to Jamaica and vanished. From his buckles Roderick is named "Silver-Shoes" by Shattuck, a buccaneer returning to Jamaica from a secret mission. On the voyage Shattuck and Silver-Shoes take command and capture an attacking Spanish ship. At Port Royal, Silver-Shoes buys the freedom of a lad, Romeo, raised by pirates, an admirer of Shakespeare and about to be sold for debt to Red Dick, a buccaneer. Silver-Shoes finds General Dudley a mutilated imbecile, called "Blunt-Nose," and kept by the buccaneers. Dudley and Silver-Shoes overhear Shattuck, the famous Morgan, and Wilkes of the Governor's Council, plot to capture Panama with the connivance of the English king. Dudley betrays to Silver-Shoes that his daughter Margot is in Panama and he himself only shamming imbecility. Shattuck discovers Silver-Shoes listening. Silver-Shoes joins the expedition; the evening ends in a drinking-bout. Blunt-Nose hurriedly explains that a Spanish lad, his fellow-prisoner, has aided Margot to escape to Spanish friends in Panama. Romeo casts his lot with Silver-Shoes. At the capture of Chagres, near the present Colon, Silver-Shoes aids the escape of Don Pedro de Luna, father of the Spanish lad, and Shattuck suspects him.

CHAPTER XIV

WE MARCH ON PANAMA

AT MIDNIGHT the fires were flickering, all noise and dicing had subsided, and Romeo quietly lay down by my side. He usually had some mad fancy wherewith to drive away my moods of the silent watches and whisk me peacefully to the vale of dreams. But to-night the cheery voice came not, and thinking he had again lost his sword at play, I turned away somewhat discontentedly, resolving to grant him the hours till dawn wherein he might reflect upon his foolish vice.

Then he spoke, softly and seriously, chiding me severely for quarreling with Red Dick because of himself, and bidding me in future grant him the privilege of his kind when settling privy matters wherein he was a factor. So warm did the lad become that it smacked of death to our comradeship. He argued and I soothed, but nevertheless I failed to convince him the fight was caused by an imaginary affront in the dungeons. Finally we became drowsy and fell asleep.

When I awoke next day he was still slumbering, but had thrust his shirt 'neath my head as a sign of repentance, and the subject was not broached again.

And now, having had a day's rest, we commenced rebuilding the palisades, rethatching the burned huts and restoring the castle to its former state of defense. The iron and brass guns were taken from the river *chattas* and with much labor mounted in the fort, and the ditch on the land side dug deeper and made wider. The castle was provisioned and vast quantities of powder and ball stored in its magazine.

All this took several days, and we were not surprised when in the early dawn our lookout cried that Morgan's ships were in

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sight. Work was suspended, and the freebooters lined the small landing to give welcome as the vessels, great and small, came slowly toward the river's mouth. The pirates on board were overjoyed at our victory, in token of which the English flag fluttered upon the hilltop.

Continuous celebration during the hurried voyage from St. Catherine had destroyed their seamanship. In consequence, four ships, one being Morgan's great galleon, ran upon the rocks. Although a number of men were drowned, the stores were saved, and had not the wind freshened we would have had the ships also. As it chanced, the sea rose and in a few hours the gale was of such strength that ere sundown they were blown to bits.

It was an inspiring sight for the great leader as he came ashore, his men lined upon the landing and along the steps to the parapet, cheering, waving their caps, the big guns booming salutes. His face was wreathed in smiles as, guided by Shattuck, he went over the fortifications. All work was suspended. Reluctant am I to write it down, but this reunion of freebooters was celebrated by the death of the Spanish prisoners in devious ways, none of which was justified and none without horrible cruelties.

For twenty-four hours there was naught but much drinking, shouting, singing and gambling; then preparations for the expedition were begun.

Being the dry season, and the river therefore shrunk to one-tenth its normal size, it became necessary to take only a small supply of provisions in the boats, otherwise we could scarce hope to drag them over the shallows. All we carried, therefore, in the way of provender was a strip or two of *charqui* and a few maize cobs, depending for victuals on the enemy's camps, which were said to line the river.

MORGAN was vastly displeased that the Spanish had discovered our intentions, but hastened departure so that in two days' time we set sail from the castle, twelve hundred strong, in five *chattas* and thirty-two canoes. Our three guides were in the foremost boat, its guns restored and matches lit ready for lurking Spaniard and hostile Indian. A garrison had been left within the castle to prevent Spanish galleons from blockading the river.

Our day's sail was pleasant, save for the great heat and a constant alertness 'gainst an unseen foe. Also the overcrowding caused some discomfort.

These South Sea freebooters are the greatest fighters and eaters in the world, and, in consequence thereof, ere nightfall many had eaten their store of food. We anchored at a spot called De los Bracos, where most of us went ashore to forage for food and stretch our cramped limbs.

There were several dwellings showing signs of having been recently abandoned, but no victuals; so, after a pipe or two of the tobacco plant, we lay down to rest, all but Morgan, who prowled watchfully and silently about his encampment, superintending in person the distribution of his wayward flock.

When the snakes had been driven to cover, the guards set and the camp become quiet, Romeo touched me on the shoulder in the darkness, and slipped a strip of *charqui* into my hand.

"Greatness must need fodder or wisdom's crown will lose its brightness."

"How came you by it?"

"I won it from Talbot in the canoe."

"Y' have a rare mind—sometimes," I replied, nibbling the food, for I had foolishly given my own away.

"Wisdom cometh in knowing that y' have it not," he retorted.

"Then seize it ere she seizes you and becomes a torment."

He laughed softly. "Why prate warnings and dislikes in the feminine? Apollo was not a hater of the sex."

The cool wind sifting through the trees acted like a drug, and as I made no answer he continued, "Ye may say y' are so—most of us do—but all, sooner or later, bend the knee. Methinks y' may be in love e'en now—as Shakespeare says, 'with a foolish love that, like a testy babe, will scratch the nurse, and presently, all humbled, will kiss the rod.' "

"Good night, lad," I murmured, drowsy in the soothing coolness and conscious only he was talking amidst the subdued murmurs of many sleeping men.

At midnight I awoke, much annoyed by singing insects, their eternal humming ending in an irritating sensation as they plunged their nippers in my flesh for a draft of blood. Romeo was aroused, as were all about us, slapping at the little devils, which

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more often than not was failure, for they were as lightning. Not till night faded into the gray of dawn did we fall asleep, then only to be awakened by orders to start, in a mist so dense and foul 'twas a wonder we could breathe it and live.

With the sunrise vanished the vapor, but in its place came the singing insects and the heat. Over each boat like a cloud hung swarms of these pests which, added to the stifling air, overcrowding and hunger, made our day far from pleasant.

Soon the river became shallow, in truth nothing more than great pools connected by miniature rapids, over which we poled with much labor. At times we struck a sleeping fish of monstrous length, covered with scales, sunning himself in the water, who would amble off, swishing his great tail and sending the mud over us in showers. Fallen trees, well rotted and imbedded in the slime, added to our difficulties, and at nightfall Morgan decided that river-travel of such a nature was too trying and arduous for starving men.

We drew up at a wayside shrine called Cruz de Juan Galleo. Amid the frightened cries of forest animals, screaming of birds, humming of insects and gnawing of hunger, we tried to rest. Here my comrade produced another strip of *charqui*, which we selfishly shared in the darkness. Near at hand paced our leader, restless with his ambitious schemes and nervous in the fear of our starvation. His alert mind foresaw our future difficulties. He was impatient to be on, and the time granted for rest was grudgingly given.

WHILE it was yet night, word came to start into a forest so thick and black that two score pirates led the way with machetes and torches, cutting a path. Here were left a hundred and sixty men in charge of the boats, with orders not to go ashore on any pretext—such was our fear of the unseen yet lurking foe.

This forest march only increased our hardships. We were in a valley of marsh and stagnant scurvy-laden pools, tramping at times in mud to our knee-pieces, climbing over a wilderness of decayed tree-trunks, and infested by garapatas which dropped from overhanging branches. With the dawn of day the sun's rays shot a heat so terrific, sifting through the thick foliage, that our arms and armor became burning metal. Aside from these discomforts, the added one of starvation brought such swearing, growling and murmuring that ere we had gone two leagues Morgan turned us about and we retraced our steps to the boats.

'Twas midday when we resumed our river road, and in the late afternoon we had made but small progress, for the river was choked with rotted timber and so low that most of us preferred to wade, dragging our ordnance in the canoes. Had we chanced upon an ambuscade 'twould have been disastrous, men being strung along the river and swampy shore at great distances.

Fortunately this did not hap, and when darkness closed down, camp was made upon a piece of firm ground giving evidence of recent cultivation by the Indians and containing a few of their huts, in wretched condition and requiring to be smoked out because of vermin ere they were habitable.

And now hunger tormented in good earnest. Romeo had a strip of *charqui*, but gave it to a miserable fellow covered with ticks and scarcely able to crawl. The lad's forethought in husbanding our provisions placed us in fair condition, and we were able to go a stone's throw into the woods where, by great luck, we killed several monkeys ere the rest fled. These were devoured by the camp, the strips of meat causing many quarrels, bare-fisted, for their possession.

The fourth day a greater part of our famished army marched by land. For the first time we perceived distant figures of Indians, who, upon gathering an idea through our slow approach of our numbers and condition, darted away.

This was encouraging, portending an ambush wherein food would be found, and at noon one of the guides, wading in advance, discovered it upon the right bank.

His shouts and the sight of a roughly made fortification of tree-trunks, moss, leaves and dried mud smacked more of feasting than fight, and regardless of formation we rushed upon it from all directions, only to find it empty and, save a few miserable shelter huts, entirely desolate.

The ground was trampled, a broad path bearing imprints of men and horses leading into the wood, revealing the departure of a considerable body of men, who, upon news

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of our approach, probably brought by the Indians we had seen, had hurriedly gathered their arms and provender and fled. So well had they removed the craved victuals that but a few crusts and breadcrums and empty leather bags remained.

Here occurred more quarreling for the bags of leather, which were torn to strips, scraped of hair, softened by boiling, and eaten with frequent gulps of foul water.

A FIGHT more serious than any preceding now took place, wherein two pirates, driven desperate by hunger, gambled for their lives, the loser to furnish food for his mates. A cry of cheating arose, and as this brought swords into play, Morgan went hastily to the scene. He forbade the wager, and threatened death to any who in future suggested it. What might be done to Spaniards was their affair, but what they did among themselves was quite another matter, and as much his business as their own.

The leather meal seemed to relieve the large number who had partaken, and midst the broiling heat of early afternoon we continued onward.

At nightfall we came upon another deserted ambuscade at a place called Torna Munni, where we camped. Romeo and several others found a large nest of snakes which, being killed and cooked, afforded relief for some two score.

The night was passed in misery. I got but little sleep and Romeo none at all, for he would persist in nursing small fires about me, covering the blaze with wet leaves, the smoke thereby keeping away humming insects and ticks.

Our fire was one of many dotting the encampment, like so many wafers in a pudding, save that the wafers were smothered in choking smoke, and alas! the pudding was not there. Dark forms in scores lay, like myself, in misery, seeking a rest which came not, because of emptiness and because of the murky vapor which, fanned by a gentle breeze, formed a storm-cloud overhead, so that only here and there could the stars shine through. Although the dark figure of our leader was scarce discernible, yet his personality was dominant with all. Hundreds of us would have turned back this night—turned forever from the golden conquest of Panama—for pieces of eight will not sweeten men's stomachs like pieces of meat. And with all their faults, these men were human. Yet Captain Morgan held them sternly to their onward march. They both feared him and loved him—feared him because of his lightning when angered and loved him because of his ability and justice and because he never failed.

CHAPTER XV

APOLLO DREAMS ANHUNGERED

AS USUAL, we were on the march ere daylight, our boats loaded with starving men too weak to walk. At noon we came across a large swinging bridge made of bejuco cane, stretching over the river near a spot called Barbacoas.

Here also were huts and plantations, but the hovels were bare of food and the plantations uncultivated. A thorough search was made, and we found another deserted ambuscade, but no horses, pigs, poultry—nothing in the way of victuals.

Romeo and I, venturing much farther into the hills than the others, came upon a cavity amidst some rocks wherein were several sacks of meal, strips of smoked meats, two great jars of wine and a mess of long yellow-skinned fruit called platanos and considered very satisfying. This was so great a find that the lad hastened to camp, while I remained on guard. Morgan sent a whole company to convey it to the boats, where it was divided among the starving men.

After an hour's rest we started on, toiling, broiling, dissatisfied and disgruntled, willing to exchange our dream of riches for the reality of food and a cooler climate, and most of us envious of those who remained behind at Chagres.

Late that night we camped in a bean-patch plucked by the Spaniards of all edible parts. This night I took care of Romeo, for the lad was asleep ere he touched the ground.

Next day revealed a horde of men who staggered and tottered as if Mars, that planet of thieves, pickpurses and boozers, had deserted them and they cared no longer for life. Each man's pace was snail-like, scuffling forward a hundred steps and then halting uncertainly, ofttimes falling to the ground in despair. The way led through a thick jungle growth, well-nigh impene-

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trable, and as the water in the river was now too deep for fording, a greater part of us cut our path upon land.

At noon we reached an open space which had been a prosperous plantation but was now abandoned. Romeo sank down upon a tree-trunk at the edge of the clearing and, wiping the sweat from his pinched face, declared he could go no farther.

Several others straggled by toward the deserted house and, through the trees beyond, a number had landed at the river-bank and were slowly coming toward us, carrying some of the starving with them.

While I was vainly attempting to ensnare a bird amidst the foliage, a great shout arose near-by and the next instant came the ripping of wood and wild yells of joy.

Romeo started up.

"That means food at last. Come on!" he said eagerly, and leaning on each other for strength, we staggered toward the house. In the rear we came to a large grain shed filled with maize. The doors had been torn apart and the freebooters were upon it, eating great handfuls dry, in their haste.

'Tis marvelous what food and a few hours' rest can do. Where we had chanced upon the place in a mood to lie down and die, we went forth, still weak and weary, but with light hearts, a new desire to achieve our undertaking, and our knap-sacks full of corn-cobs.

When later we ran upon another ambuscade, I doubt whether Satan himself could have prevented its capture. Here, as elsewhere, we found no one, and in like fashion discovered naught in the way of victuals. On the opposite bank of the river, however, were a company of Indians, who departed, after sending several showers of arrows, shouting in broken Spanish, which one of our guides translated:

"Ha, ye English dogs! Go to the plain! Go to the plain! Ye'll get what ye came for there!"

HERE we camped for the night. I lay apart, as was my custom, taking care the drift of smoke should come my way. Romeo later came from the logwood-fire and lay beside me, growling of the madman who had led us into such a steaming wilderness of starvation. He e'en made the suggestion I take leadership of twoscore disgruntled comrades, from whom he had conceived the wild idea, and start back for Chagres. I scoffed at him, and after much argument he desisted.

Early next day we cleaned our arms from rust and mud, discharging them to prove their condition, for the Indians upon yonder bank portended fight. With guns loaded, matches lit and swords drawn, we crossed the river in our canoes.

Seemingly the foe had vanished, for we marched without molestation the entire forenoon, halting at a small village called Venta Cruz, which had previously been captured by Sir Francis Drake.

Here we saw smoke issuing from the chimneys, which gave rise to the hope of finding victuals. In consequence, therefore, labor was doubled at the oars, and upon reaching the rude landings we jumped ashore and rushed into the town—only to find it like all the rest, deserted and minus provender.

The stone storehouses of the Government and the stables of the King were securely fastened and caused much trouble in gaining entrance, which, when accomplished, was productive of naught save a number of jars of wine.

Many took huge drafts and shortly several of them fell to the ground, where they rolled about groaning heavily. 'Twas thought the wine was poisoned, and, in consequence thereof, what remained was poured into the street.

Because of this sickness affecting four score of our number, we camped the afternoon and night. At dusk the sufferers grew better, and Morgan rightly saw and thereafter remembered that a meal of cooked leather and raw maize doth not set well with a jack of rich wine, more especially when the drinking on't is done after a joust at starvation.

With the guards about us, Romeo finally ceasing from his chatter, and the camp in quietness save for those who kept vast fires belching clouds of smoke, I tried to compose myself to sleep, yet that sweet sauce to my day's labor was not to be found.

Many of our number were resting within the huts, but as many more were lying in the one street, preferring the heat of bon-fires to the shelter of flimsy walls. Not far away was a stone house reserved for our leader and surrounded by sentinels. He sat on the threshold, stool tilted against

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the opening, his arms folded and his eyes gazing upward into the blue.

What was passing within that daredevil brain, he alone knew. Dreams of conquest, gold and power, with torture and death to his enemies? Visions of banquets, rich wines and rare dishes? A glimpse of Panama, her people in chains, her houses in ruins and her monstrous wealth within his grasp? Or perchance, a phantom of a new world power—a throne and a crown; Spain humbled and bleeding; England fearful and envious; Holland seductive and flirting for friendship, and strong-armed Louis and France his ally? Any or all of these dreams were writ in that one beacon of light, glittering above all others—Morgan's star we called it. To-night, it pierced the smoke-clouds and sparkled strong, brilliant and steady.

Near at hand, from the darkness betwixt the huts, came Shattuck, big and powerful, his head bent and arms clasped behind him, stepping carefully through the lines of sleepers. Since starting he had said naught to me, but his glance was distrustful, and I knew he was still mulling on the escape of my prisoner at Chagres. But the uneasiness of his first insinuation had left me, for he could not know, and his knowledge regarding rope-cutting would not alone prove treachery or treason.

Treason to such as these! Ye Gods! I laughed aloud, whereat he stopped, turned and came my way, but perceiving me, turned again and a few minutes later Morgan disappeared with him into their quarters.

AGAIN I tried to woo the elusive goddess and, womanlike, when most desired she came not.

My thought returned to England: the news from my good friend Faye Powers of the coveted captaincy; the arrival of Yorke's courier—the unbounded joy betwixt Faye and myself, for, heart of my heart as he was, he showed more pleasure than I. And then we parted for a few hours, and pouf! the day was gone, and night, eternal, hideous and full of specters, clamped upon me the sudden wreck of my career.

Here I was in a lush land of loose living and languor, hunting a maid (whose sex I feared more than Holland's hosts) and if successful, God knows how I could hope to return with the baggage safely to England.

I scooped away some troublesome turf and lay more securely within the hollow, yet my eyes were open and a wretched brain remained busy. I fell pondering of old Blunt-Nose. In a few sentences he had given me an idea of the heartache and misery of his life. What strange, mad pranks Dame Fortune plays at times. General Dudley, courted, fêted, admired and praised; next to Cromwell the most talked-of and honored; owner of castles and wealth; the iron-clawed conqueror of Scotland; warm-hearted, frank and polished; towns turning out *en masse* to see him ride by, the mothers holding aloft their babes for his notice and blessing.

And now—Blunt-Nose! Alone, friendless, tortured and maimed, pleading insanity to save a body from further abuse, and not a hand beyond mine own and a Spanish boy's to give him e'en a pleasant greeting. Small wonder he would not return to England, his face mangled, his legs shriveled and his shoulder disfigured. None would know him, and the pride of General Dudley would not permit the pity of Blunt-Nose.

His daughter must needs be a beauty, a wit, with hauteur and dignity in her bearing, and possessed of rare understanding, else she would not have caught my brother's fancy. Suppose she be in love with some stranger—perchance wedded? Nay, such a thought was wanton and did her rank injustice.

And still sleep was far away. I dug my bed to a surface more soothing to brain and body. Suppose she would not trust herself to me and refused to return. In such event—i' faith, the baggage would go by force. That thought pleased me mightily. I said it over several times, when I felt a prod and, opening my eyes, found Romeo gazing at me curiously.

"And who is the baggage to be taken by force, Silver-Shoes?" he asked in a low voice.

"I know not what you mean. Go to sleep," I answered vaguely.

"Aye—but y' were muttering of a maid and a brother and a king. Art well, Silver-Shoes?" There was a note of mock anxiety in his voice.

"Go to sleep I say."

He chuckled and rolled over.

"Y' are but a poor keeper of state

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secrets, Apollo. Stick to the song of y' sword and grant Eros his arrows." He paused and yawned. "'Tis a man of few words y' are Silver-Shoes—save when asleep," he added drowsily.

I winced, and the wonder of what I might have said kept me awake another hour. Why did the lad call me Apollo? Like many of his strange sayings, it had neither rhyme nor reason. And since we started on this venture he had so named me many times, always with a suggestion in his tone that he knew something I had not told. Could he know of my pain-racked vision upon the floor of Dudley's hut, for 'twas there the name first came to me, but from a maid—created by a vast disorder of vile rum and lemon—a fanciful maid, whose dark eyes and wondrous beauty so mixed the physical torture with one mentally unreal as to banish both when pain departed and I awoke.

Now my thoughts blended and I dozed off to a land of victuals and banquets, wherein rich viands and richer wines were piled high before me and I gorged to satiety.

CHAPTER XVI

A SAVANNA BLACK WITH ENEMY

AT DAYBREAK our outposts discovered a road, well paved with stones, leading into the forest. Much encouraged at this sign of nearing the end of our journey, we formed early for marching.

Two hundred of the strongest were sent in advance with matches lighted, to clear the way and expose Spanish ambuscades. As the lad and myself were poor marksmen, we remained with the main body, tramping at quick-step upon the smooth, straight road.

We had gone but a league when we heard firing ahead, and, pushing forward, met our advance fighting an Indian troop upon a small hill in open country, having driven them from an ambuscade amongst the wood.

Under orders from Morgan to capture some alive, whereby to discover the forces and defense of Panama, our men proceeded warily. The wily cacique was clever, and in the skirmish which followed, although he and many of his men were killed, yet none were captured. Those who escaped reappeared at a distance amidst scrubby growth where they shouted defiance.

"Ha! Ye dogs! Ye English dogs!" they cried, in the same broken Spanish of their forest companions we had previously encountered. "Come on to the plain—all of ye—and see what awaits ye there!"

From the crest of the hill we could look across a small valley to a second rise, beyond which, in the distance, faintly appeared the tip of a lone spire. Our guides said this second rise shut out the view of Panama itself.

In the valley betwixt grew a small thick wood which could hold a strong force unperceived, so Morgan, in fear of an ambush, sent a force to clean it of both Spaniard and Indian. The wisdom of such procedure soon became apparent, for we saw the miniature skirmish below, and shortly a small body of Spanish horse dashed up the road of the opposite hill, all save two disappearing over the crest. These remained as sentinels, much to our amusement.

Night was fast closing down and with it came a drenching rain, shutting us in by a wall of water and causing a hasty search for shelter. Most of the dwellings had been fired on our approach, but we found several isolated shepherd's shealings, in which our arms were placed. A few managed to creep in amidst them and gain a night's rest, but the greater part of us were forced to lie in the downpour lasting the night through.

The rain ceased at dawn and the clouds rolled away. We dried our garments as best we could by wringing them. Then came the order to march while the cool lasted, for we were in open country, on the great savanna, where there was no shade from giant trees.

We passed safely through the small forest in the valley and, as we marched up the opposite slope, a detached squadron of Spanish horse converged into a compact body some distance ahead, retiring as we approached, waving their pikes and shouting defiance. This puppet-show cheered us mightily.

SOON we reached the summit and paused with satisfaction at the panorama before us. Below, and partly hidden by a gently undulating savanna, lay the city of Panama, revealed

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by its spires and many columns of smoke. Beyond stretched the North Sea, of a deep, wondrous blue, its color intensified by flecks of white from several passing sail. The clouds were fleeced, and so intermingled with far-away peaks of the snow-covered sierra, 'twas difficult to tell where cloud left off and hilltop commenced. And over the green savanna, the ocean, the ships and the shrouded hills, the sun shone with a brightness which transformed everything into a natural jewel of vast value, the like of which had nowhere been seen before.

But the snow of the sierra, the welcome glint of gold from the tall spire and the blue of the North Sea were as dross to the pastoral picture directly below us. A real picture of a verdant pasture wherein cattle, horses and asses were contentedly grazing—a picture so suggestive of our greatest need that all fairly groaned in anticipation.

Instantly several score crept stealthily down the hillside and soon returned, screaming with joy and dragging huge carcasses of fresh meat.

Over great fires the flesh was blackened, and most of it was swallowed half-cooked, such was the haste. Romeo secured a juicy strip and roasted it daintily over a small fire of his own, regaling me with tales of banquets which curled my tongue to a dry ball. While our comrades were devouring their portions, he turned and returned his strip upon an improvised griddle of sticks. Finally, after teasing to the point of endurance, he cut the meat and tossed me half, flinging with it a poor quotation from his quack friend.

I have eaten of sumptuous banquets in many lands, wherein the best that could be had was set before me, but never was there a meal smacking so of pure joy as did each morsel of this one. We ate heartily and in precaution packed the remainder in our kits.

The freebooters were lolling contentedly upon the ground, smiling faces were again seen, jests were offered, gambling recommenced and gaiety banished gloom. Many took a long siesta, and so great was the sudden change of temper that we did not start until past midday.

Morgan sent a body of men in advance, with orders to take prisoners, for as yet we were in ignorance of the Spanish force. At dusk a troop of their horse came in sight, perchance our friends of the north, but they contented themselves with shouting invective we could not understand. Catching sight of our advance-guard, they turned about and rode away with all speed.

Just as the sun was setting and the one short minute of southern twilight set in, we caught first glimpse upon the rolling savanna of fabled Panama. The sun danced upon the grasses and shrubs lining our way, making of them a many-colored frame for the distant buildings, whose glitter of bronze and metal roofs was significant of the gold contained within coffers below. It seemed a fairy city wrapped in slumber, approaching that hidden El Dorado which many have sought. The yellow ball, sinking slowly o'er the distant hills, changed the colors to deeper tints until they lost contrast, blending into brown, then gray, and finally darkness shut down.

Thereupon appeared bonfires, one after the other, outside the city walls, reincarnating the fairy city of slumber into one of alertness and preparation—a long, snake-like chain of pin-points of light stretching from coast to timber-land, silent watchdogs against surprise.

But the freebooters were too contented with their feasting, and too lazy thereby, to do aught this night save eat more of the precious viands and give themselves up to hilarity. Guns were fired, hats and shirts flung skyward, trumpets blared discordantly, drums beat and men shouted, swore and sang. It seemed indeed as if Bethlehem Hospital had turned loose its Bedlam Beggars upon the hills before Panama, and only the cry of "Poor Tom is a-cold," was needed to make the illusion complete.

Only Romeo and myself, on a small eminence, and Morgan some distance away, surrounded by his officers, were spectators to the celebration, until a small squadron of Spanish cavalry, hearing the noise from Panama, rode within gunshot to find the cause. At intervals during a lull, they shouted threats, which never failed to bring laughter and renewed jovialty.

At midnight, when the camp grew quiet, many of the Spaniards returned to the city, but the rest rode about us till dawn. Ere the sky began to redden, Panama commenced firing her heaviest guns, the balls

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rolling harmlessly to our outposts and there exploding.

WE WERE up betimes, for the objective lay before us, like a fatted goose ready to be plucked. Our formation made, we set out toward the city to the tune of trumpets and drums, the waving of flags and the singing of ribald songs.

We had gone but a short distance when the guides advised Morgan to leave the road and attack from another quarter. In expectation of our approach by the main roadway there were sure to be several ambuscades, the trees would be filled with sharpshooters, and the guns of the city were probably placed to command this position.

Morgan accordingly turned west of the highway into tangled undergrowth among the trees, making progress slow and difficult. After several hours of wearisome marching we came upon the savanna, half a league from the city, so hidden by a small hill that, until the rise was topped, we were not seen.

Once upon the crest, we paused in astonishment at the display of force drawn up on the plain before us. A low cry, partly of fear, swept over the freebooters, and in the sudden change of heart four-fifths, despite their known courage and daring, wished themselves safely back in Chagres Castle.

The plain was massed with foes, in a long, solid phalanx, heavily equipped with pikes and swords, and whole companies sheathed in armor. It was as if the entire force of Spain in the New World had gathered to exterminate our band of half-starved, footsore invaders, now reduced through recent hardship to less than a thousand all told. Flags waved, trumpets blared, the deep-throated defiance of many times our number swept through our chilled souls with the pain of lead. The sunlight on their weapons, held ominously above their heads to emphasize the spoken taunt, gave the plain an appearance of grass-blades of steel.

All songs and hilarity were gone, and the hush of death succeeded. Men were dumb at the display. Jaws drooped, swords were sheathed, and after a second glance eyes were cast upon the ground in invisible dismay. We seemed to have had our labor for our pains, and life was done.

Naught save death lay before us—death for us all. My search for the maid was ended, and shortly I would be forced to lay down a worthless life. How glorious it would be to die, an if die I must, with sword in hand upon the field of battle! And I would show these outcasts who had of a sudden turned craven, how an Englishman meets death! So amidst the hush I laughed loudly, whereat scores of eyes were centered upon me in wonder, and Shattuck, standing apart near Morgan, the latter seated upon a tree-stump, scowled at me.

MORGAN dropped the glass from his eyes and turned toward me, beckoning sharply for my presence beside him and Shattuck.

As I started forward Romeo whispered in my ear, "Ye fool!" whereupon I dug him in the ribs until he howled for mercy.

"What think ye, Silver-Heels?" said the leader, handing me his glass, and I looked—looked into the front of thousands, as if they were at my sword-point, wondering which one of the multitude would deal the final thrust, and why, instead of lance and sword at rest, they did not bear me down.

I took away the magic, and again they were afar—a long ominous blur of color, the sparkle of steel and the glint of armor predominant.

"It reminds me of a picture I once saw in Holland, wherein men were painted till there wast no room for more. With a taper I could have destroyed hundreds. With a sword," again I laughed, glancing toward the plain, "'tis a pity there are so few!"

Morgan looked at me doubtfully.

"Doth your food hurt, or do you mean it?"

"Mean it?" I replied quickly. "For sure, I mean it. Did not your star yestereve shine like a ball of fire? Did it falter or change shape? Was it ever so bright before? Can such an omen bespeak aught else than victory?"

"He courts death," interrupted Shattuck. "'Tis success in finding it which hath put the chip on his shoulder."

"Nay," replied Morgan, rising and thwacking me upon the back. "He hath my eyes, my brain, my heart! Glad am I y' are with us, Silver-Heels! Y' are a man!"

I bowed jauntily, and smiled at Shattuck,

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who shifted his posture uneasily, but his eyes were glued to my face. Our leader sat down again, picked up the glass and commenced to chuckle.

"Silver-Heels, 'tis a flock of sheep, well fed, ready for market. We shall buy, but not pay."

"Nay, they will pay," I bantered, the River Styx before my eyes and Charon, that gloomy old shade of rough beard and wretched clothes, awaiting to ferry me across into oblivion.

"Aye—they will pay," repeated Morgan, and strong in his star of success, he meant it. Had not death been so near, I would have wondered at him.

"I see but two squadrons of horse," he continued. "Not more than four hundred in all. 'Tis well; for there lies our chief danger. As for the rest—bah! So many wisps to trample. A little game of bowls upon the green. What say, bold Silver-Heels?"

"Aye—a game of bowls, and no man can miss!"

"Right-o, none can miss. Ten—twenty, i' faith, four and twenty companies of foot."

"Of foot, captain, not of arm!" I said flippantly, and now I had placed the coin to my lips and Charon had a passenger.

"Again right-o. Heart o' mine,' tis but four and twenty hundred little wickets to topple. By my star, I knew not there were so many of the yellow devils in our new land. And that dark mass to the right?—youth hath good eyes—look ye, Silver-Heels."

Again I looked, but now there was a blur and I saw not, for the river was wide and Charon poling hard. Morgan took the glass and looked for some time. Then he dropped it and arose, his face rippling in smiles and his eyes shining.

"Dick, my boy, what think ye? We are fighting *cattle*, not Dons. That dark cloud yonder is naught but bulls in charge of slaves and Indians." He walked down the silent lines of his army, chaffing and joking, telling them of this new force; waxing sarcastic and asking their fears of cattle, and i' faith, Charon had turned his boat about and was refusing the entrance I craved. My face lost its bravado and I stared ahead gloomily.

"Y' are afeard o' *bulls*," sneered Shattuck as he passed, and I scarce heard him.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SWORD OF SILVER-SHOES

THE cheering news that what we had thought a second army of ten thousand men were naught but cattle restored drooping spirits, and, like the veering of a weather-cock, so changed our tempers.

Companies were reformed, swords and muskets examined, matches lit, eyes glowed with the fire of conquest, and drums beat, while Morgan, astute, careful and born leader that he was, made his plans.

With Romeo and threescore courageous devils, I took position at the extreme right, to ward off a flank movement. Two hundred who were expert in gun-play were sent forward to pot-shot their leaders and draw them from their formation. The rest formed in a large hollow square.

Beyond, encircling the horizon, was the sea, calm, quiet and picturesque; nearer lay the city, its walls rising high and bleak, upon the top of which stretched a line of color, showing the people as interested and undoubtedly confident spectators; nearer than both sea and city stood the immense squadrons, file upon file—awaiting the moment to spring and devour, like a tiger stalking its prey. Close at hand was our toy army; a mere speck upon the landscape—a fly opposing the advance of a host of spiders—but each man's match was lit, his sword unstrapped, his knives and pistols loose in his sash. And every face was turned, first in defiance toward the enemy, then with eagerness at the city beyond, and lastly with contempt along the dark line of cattle. They had fought Dons before, at odds nigh as great, and cattle, a new force in warfare, were an unknown quantity but failed to inspire fear.

Small puffs of smoke dotted the plain for upward of an hour, yet the solid lines failed to move. Many of their leaders were shot, but as they sent forth sharpshooters, augmented by others, our musketeers were gradually forced back, and finally we were in turn subjected to the same disadvantage.

Then came orders to break ranks and reform upon a small hill some hundreds of yards distant, so situate because of bog and marshland they could attack on one side only.

During the scramble which followed, our disorder was apparent, and thinking, per-

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haps, we had become overawed at such display of strength and were seeking escape, the squadrons of cavalry came dashing over the plain to ride us down and turn retreat into rout.

But the quagmire, snags and soft turf prevented their wide sweep from encircling, and at last they gathered upon firm ground to our fore, with their officers in front, swords and lances flashing, shouting, "Viva el Rey! Viva el Rey!" and charged up the slope.

Until the thunder of hoofs, the clank of armor and the rattle of steel were almost in our midst, not a shot was fired. Then the signal was given, and three lines of flame—the first lying upon the ground, the second kneeling, the third erect—hurled their leaden messengers of death, so close that our powder-corns burnt their foremost horses, and no man could miss. A dense cloud of smoke curled upward and in the still air settled down again, so thick and stifling that friend and foe were made alike, and men choked and swore for breath.

The din was terrifying, and "Viva el Rey" drowned by the clash of steel, screams of horses and cries of wounded men. One magnificent animal, snorting in terror and rearing upon his hindquarters, brought both fore feet down upon my troublesome opponent, crushing him to pulp. So near was the sweep of his hoofs I felt them pass my cheek. Ere he reared again, I was in his saddle. Others of our number were doing likewise, and when the smoke lifted and the flower of Spanish chivalry were broken in disorder and scampering away, we had nigh twoscore horsemen of our own.

THERE were but a few moments of rest. The companies of foot had been marching over the plain and now were upon the slope—masses of men which would have intimidated any except our spawn of foul breeding, whose lust for fight was now aroused and who knew not fear.

Shattuck came panting to my side, his sword crimson, his armor dented and stained, his eyes wild with slaughter.

"Keep out o' this, Siller-Shoes," he shouted, pointing to the Spanish foot, now half-way up the slope. "We'll take care o' them. There be y' work. Them devilish horse, what will return, an' ye——" He stopped suddenly, snarling like the beast he was, for a stray bullet had seared his lips. Then he turned and darted away to his mates, eagerly expectant behind hasty breastworks of the dead.

Beyond the advancing infantry the residue of cavalry were gathering for a second charge. Despite their losses, they outnumbered our two score riders six to one. And there our duty lay e'en though death, sure and swift, awaited us all. Turning to those about, I raised my sword-point toward the plain. They understood, these devils of the Inferno, and we dashed down the slope at full speed.

The breeze kissed my cheeks with the sobbing note of a maid's farewell; the thunder of battle behind formed a chord for my entrance into the hereafter, and the waiting squadrons before us seemed the requiem of immortality. Then we swept into them and were engulfed.

Thrice I was unhorsed, and thrice remounted; blows were showered upon me from all sides; savage sweeps of heavy weapons clashed like hailstones 'gainst my helmet and breastplate, and once I fell with my steed, to be trampled by the surge over me—yet the blow I expected had not been given, and ere I knew how it happed I was mounted again. We formed a circle within a circle, which slowly yet surely was narrowing. When, in my wild fever of fight, I flung myself into their midst, my companions would follow close by my side and the two circles be reformed.

Time and again this was done, and time and again Death oped her jaws but to snap at me, yet we were reduced to less than a score and the end was in sight. But for me it came not. Ere my remaining companions had fallen, the battle beyond was finished. The Spaniards were in retreat, flying helter-skelter over the plain. The wild bulls had become frightened at the noise and, instead of dashing in our midst, broke through their keepers to freedom within the far-away forest. Two hundred of our number were like leeches upon the circle's edge, hacking and slashing, preventing the end I desired.

Those remaining of the Spanish squadrons turned and dashed away, and we were surrounded by a screaming group of kindred souls. While I was looking in a daze at the cowardly retreat, which seemed a plain of men gone mad with terror, my

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horse cried pitifully, wobbled in his position and then sank slowly to the ground.

A score of hands caught me. A score of willing shoulders bore me, and with the other survivors I was carried back in triumph, up a slope now covered with dead and dying, beyond the redoubt of fallen animals, and put tenderly upon some clean turf. I sat motionless, dazed, looking ever toward the city and slowly comprehending that Death had been foiled in this my greatest fight. In the reaction tears coursed down my cheeks and my mouth blubbered like a babe.

"'Fore God, he's a-sobbing!" said one.

"'Tis the devil's tears," said another.

"He sobs for there be no more to kill," said a third.

"His glory be our'n too," said a fourth, whereupon they all mouthed "Aye" and fell silent, nursing their multiple of wounds and gazing at me. These four and myself were all who returned of our two score—two-score heroes, for they were just that. Had conditions been different and my brain in less disorder, I would have clasped them to my heart as brothers.

THE Spanish foot, fleeing across the plain in great disorder, offered no united resistance to bands of our number who pursued them nigh to the gates and returned laden with spoils and prisoners.

Those remaining upon the hillside had stripped the piles of dead of their valuables and were now arrayed in Spanish clothing, grotesque in misfit, and each man had a cluster of swords, daggers and pistols in his sash. As for the dead—they were multifold, outnumbering the grass-blades upon the slope and littering the swamp and marshland. Among the prisoners were several cowled monks of wholesome girth, fat and red of face, who had been surprised in the undergrowth near the sea. These Morgan ordered before him, where he gave each a careful interrogation as to the churches and their wealth. Receiving indifferent answers and no information of value, he handed them over to several score of the pirates near-by.

I draw a veil over what followed—'twas dastardly, inhuman. Suffice it to say they were put to death most cruelly, their indifference giving way to screams of agony during the torture.

This had visible effect upon the group of remaining prisoners. Their teeth chattered, their faces were wild and terror-stricken, their legs wobbled, many knelt in prayer. Morgan went among them, asking questions and now receiving the desired information. He assured them he meant no harm, granted them permission to return home and, providing no resistance was offered, they would not be molested. This he bade them tell their friends and then they scurried off, much like a frightened flock of geese.

Romeo had lain down beside me, coming from whence I know not, for after the first clash we were separated. He had a cruel hurt in his shoulder, which I bound with velveteen, and then he lay away from me, his eyes closed and breathing heavily.

Morgan strolled to my side and held out his hand.

"I give ye praise, Silver-Heels—y' work was well done. What wilt have when the city is taken?"

"My captain's good opinion," I answered.

He seemed surprised.

"Ye certes have that, my brave fellow. Is there aught else?"

I shook my head, and after looking at me thoughtfully for a moment, he walked away, and I snuggled down beside Romeo somewhat pleased with myself. But he oped an eye and blinked at me leeringly.

"Prithee, what have y' gained by such empty lip?"

"A friendship I may need."

He gave a short laugh.

"Friendship with him is bought by gold. Words mean naught to a freebooter. 'Twill not help ye."

"Help me? What mean you?"

"Did y' not say y' might need it? Furthermore, y' talk like a parrot in y' sleep."

"So you have said before. I believe it not."

"Y' do, Silver-Shoes. By my book, I would sooner trust a babe with secrets. No offense, comrade, for the revelation is not of your choosing. Faith, I know your quest to the Indies."

"Tell it me, then," I said in sarcasm.

"To search for a maid pledged to y' brother, and whom, when found, y' will take to England. Also, y' fought a duel, which, for a soldier, weighs marvelously upon y' mind. And again, y' think y' are in mortal

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terror of wenches; a monstrous posture to be in when a-hunting one so zealously to do sweet service! Zooks! Y' fine shoes would ne'er tempt me to the wearing of them."

"May Satan fly away with you!" I cried astounded. "How long have you known this?"

"Since the first day we met."

"Impossible!"

"Hark ye," he continued, raising himself on elbow with an effort. "We parted at the cane-patch. On my way to town I passed Shattuck. I knew he was bound to Blunt-Nose. I knew also your dislike and I feared the harm he might do. So I turned back and lingered. When Morgan came, I hid in the cane. Later I perceived ye at a drinking bout—a foolhardy thing for ye to do, a newcomer to the land; I had sense to gather herbs, which I steeped when Shattuck had left and forced down y' throat. Otherwise, Silver-Shoes, y' would not be here this day."

"Then 'twas you, my good friend, who placed the coat 'neath my head?"

"Aye—as I did the cup to your lip, whereat ye told me all which had chanced and what ye would do. And 'twas I called ye 'Apollo driven from Heaven,'" he laughed. "Y' thought me some errant maid, for ye raved like a love-struck dandy. Silver-Shoes a hater of the sex! Faith, wouldst like to hear some of the things said to me?"

"Nay!" I interrupted hastily.

"Then mention not your dislike of wenches, for y' are a rare deceiver. But Silver-Shoes, the reason which brought ye here hath gained my friendship as no service rendered could have done. I, too, worship the maid Margot—the sweetest, rarest, finest flower of love's garden ever kissed by the rain-drops or wooed by the winds. Nay," he paused, "she is not for me. But to serve her I would give my life thrice. Did ye not marvel at my choice of ye upon our start from Port Royal? A freebooter does not pick as comrade a man he hath seen but a few hours and then not again till the day of sailing."

"Aye—I wondered at it somewhat."

"Well, y' need wonder no longer." He lay comfortably back upon the grass, serenely unconscious of the cries of the wounded, the turmoil from the distant city or the occasional boom of cannon. "And, furthermore, Silver-Shoes," he chuckled, "tell naught in slumber save with y' head in the hollow of my arm."

"You are a little devil," I retorted, not unkindly, but he gave no answer.

CHAPTER XVIII

MARGOT

THERE is an ancient Spanish proverb which says, "The frightened partridge is half-cooked," and could we of Chagres Castle have looked in upon fabled Panama the night before commencing our inland journey, the scene must have pleased us mightily, for the city was in the throes of deadly fear. Panama had oped her sleepy eyes that morning serenely confident in her safety from the horde of devils and dragons who were being annihilated at the river's mouth. The news of our first charge at midday and its repulse had reached her the night previous, and the city passed the greater part of the hours of darkness in celebration. So much so that the sun was high ere she awoke, and then but to recommence the festivities.

Within the Praca dos Romulares, a dense crowd of soldiers and civilians had gathered, laughing and talking excitedly. About the spiked aloes and orange and pimento trees set in tubs and oil-jars in the square, divers nobles had spread rude tables from which their servants dispensed wine and sweetmeats. The Governor's house at the end was thrown open to the crowd, who sat on the balconies, ledges and leads, and two small beggars were astride the pair of lion-heads over the entrance, their vocation forgotten in the excitement.

At the water-front bordering the Calle de San Domingos, among the hundreds of blacks but newly brought to the immense slave-mart, the same jubilation prevailed, only less demonstrative, for the sharp eyes of their keepers were upon them and the sting of the lash was a cruel thing. Even the ragged half-idiot street-sweeper paused now and then in the gutter to wave his broom and shout, "*Toma! Toma!*"

Over all slowly rose the sun, cooling the festivities by its heat and sending the crowds to the shade of ordinaries or to the grove of pimento-trees a half-league from the city, where at high noon took place the bull-fight of Santa Anna. No one

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thought of work, and far away on the hills wandered flocks of swine at will, for the swine-herds, too, had heard the tumult and were among the throng to gather for free victuals and drink. 'Twas a day of joy for all.

While the mellow warmth still poured upon the city in late afternoon, a small cavalcade of three horsemen came dashing over the crest of Algeziras from the direction of Venta Cruz. Ere the sun disappeared the three horses had clattered through the streets and were standing riderless and dripping with foam before the Governor's house, while within the square crowded now so vast a concourse of citizens that they swayed to and fro in a dark wave.

But each face bore a dazed expression and a strange hush was over all. They talked in whispers, and the soldiers' places were taken by cowled monks who moved about like grim mentors, holding aloft their crucifixes and muttering strange prayers. The wine-laden tables were still in place and the tired servitors at their task, but in a silence grim and full of specters, and the drinker gulped his potion more for courage than joy.

The cause for this sudden change lay upon the most dejected of the three spent horses tethered before the Governor's house, he who had borne Don Pedro de Luna on the last stage of his journey from Venta Cruz—bearer of the news that Chagres had fallen and he alone had escaped.

From a byway rattled a troop of horse, the riders reeling in the saddle from the day and night of hilarity, and their long pikes imperiling one another. Down through the torch-lit alley they clattered, followed shortly by another squadron, bound for the plain before the city, there to repel these dragons and offshoots of purgatory.

No one knew when they would appear. They were supernatural. Some said they had two heads and four arms, and were immune against death; others, that they breathed fire and traveled with wings; that they were real devils from Hell; and all were stricken dumb that their strongest fortress, but of late reinforced by their best men and heaviest metal, should have fallen.

Thus night enfolded the city compassionately, covering the dread fear. The crowd in the Praca dos Romulares had dwindled to small groups, who ran like flocks of sheep here and there, crying and cursing. Within the homes of the rich and poor alike, ablaze with candle and torch, all were busied with their goods, packing them in baskets for convoy to Peru or burying them in secret places.

DON PEDRO DE LUNA came from the Governor's house at nine by the clock into a square well-nigh deserted save for the litter of food and empty flagons. From the Street of the Five Wounds came sounds of wailing. Before him, upon the Plaza Jesu Nazaren, were a score of women telling their beads before a cowled and dreaded servant of their Inquisition.

He drew the borrowed mantle close about him, and, with his hand on his sword, for the city was of a sudden grown lawless and no man's life was safe, made his way down the Street of God's Blessing, stepping hurriedly from the glare of open casements and seeking the shadows. He paused at a house heavily shuttered and outwardly deserted, save for a flickering torch over the entrance. The wooden door was cumbrous with gold bosses and the threshold deeply bitten by a coat of arms, from which a dove, silvered and well outlined, seemed to plead vainly in the ghastly light for release. At his knock, a panel was drawn and the somber face of a slave peered out in sudden fright. Then came a cry of delight and surprise, the rattle of chains, and the door swung open.

In the large hall, near a jutting of candlelight, stood a maid closely wrapped in a rich mantilla, holding a sword, who, upon seeing the newcomer, dropped it and ran eagerly to him.

For some minutes his arms enfolded her and neither spoke, while the slave rebolted and chained the door and slipped away. Then the maid drew off, still holding his hands, and looked at him with shining eyes. While they were standing in silence, there came from without the click of hoofs upon the limestone and the jingle of armor and weapons. Thus they stood until the troop had passed beyond.

"I have thought of you often, señorita," he said, throwing off his mantle. "And absence hath made the heart grow fonder. Since parting at Chagres, you seem almost my daughter."

"Why not?" she replied. "Was I not sent

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you by your son? And have I not told you you were my good, kind and generous godfather?"

"Yes—but for a twelvemonth I have neither seen you nor sent word, and Chagres is scarce a week hence."

"Which I understand," she said quickly. "You were busied at the fortress. But I remember well how gentle you were; how I, a heretic and unbeliever, was sheltered and guarded for three whole weeks till I could stand the journey here, and all because of a note I bore from your son. For aught you know he might have been forced to write."

"Nay, señorita. The letter was not needed. You are a flower of virtuous beauty whose perfume hath intoxicated me. Doth the Señora Alvarez know of our defeat?"

The maid nodded. "Her brother, Don Phillipe, brought news an hour past. She is closeted with Archbishop Perez, arranging our departure."

"His Eminence," turning toward her and lowering his voice, "hath he spoken much with you?"

She made no answer save by compressing her lips. And then from without came the heavy tramp of companies of foot, their metal clanking in unison with their tread, finally dying away in the distance, and all was quiet again.

"I remember our talk at Chagres, and I know," he said gravely. She made a gesture of impatience, and he checked his words. Instead he slipped back the lace of his wristband. "See you these scars?"

She drew away with an exclamation of horror. "Were they done in the torture-chamber?" she asked, in an awed whisper.

He gave a low laugh. "By my soul, no, my child. They were cut by a rope, a cruel rope yet kind, which saved my life at Chagres, for down it I climbed to the shore and safety. I was fairly caught by one of the pirates——" he paused. "Nay, 'twas an English gentleman, who jammed me 'gainst the wall with the strength and ferocity of a bull, and then—released me and aided my escape."

"An English gentleman? What mean you?"

"*Si*, I wondered that such should be among them. But he had a look of quality and an air of breeding. In an ill-conditioned speech of gratitude, I gave my name. *He knew of my son, and bade me mention to you a ring of beaten gold with a stone of crimson.*"

She rose suddenly to her feet, the mantilla falling to the floor, and placed both hands upon his shoulders. Her eyes were shining upon him with an intensity to search his soul.

"What was he like?" she breathed.

"I could not tell. 'Twas dusk and the affair passed quickly."

"Did he have this ring upon his finger."

Don Pedro looked up in surprise. From her attitude, the drawn tone of voice, the quivering of her fingers and the quick rise and fall of rare lace upon her breast, something of import was taking place. He felt a tinge of curiosity, which, being of Spanish birth, he tried to conceal, and which for the selfsame reason he could not. So he ventured,

"This Englishman said mention of the jewel was enough—that you would understand."

"I do," replied the maid, almost in a whisper, concentrating all effort in maintaining her composure, which nevertheless would have been in vain, had not a priest, in a cloth-of-gold robe and wearing a three-pointed black velvet hat, at this moment come slowly down the stairway. He stooped to pick up the mantilla and then bowed gravely as the Don rose to his feet.

"Your servant, señor," he said in a deep voice. "You are Don Pedro de Luna—bearer of most grievous news."

"*Si*, your Eminence," replied the Don.

The Archbishop shot a lightning glance at the maid, who was gazing upon the sword, with thoughts far away.

"I perceive plainly this little unbeliever hath introduced us," he continued, unsmiling, and tossing the silken garment upon her shoulder. "Truth clears a story, but never darkens." He bowed again, and with another glance at the small figure, passed down the hall and disappeared. The Don looked after him gravely and shook his head.

"*Mia niña*, he is one of the best, yet most dangerous men of God in the city. Have a care, I beg of you."

She jumped to her feet with assumed gaiety. "The flesh-pots of Egypt have come to Panama," she said lightly, pointing toward the stairs. "Come, godfather. The señora is alone."

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IN A large room, the walls of which were hung with paintings and the waxed floor covered with Persian rugs, beside a great brasero of silver filled with delicate blooms, Señora Alvarez was busy with her tablets of crusted gold. She was not aware of the maid's entrance until the latter spoke. Then she laid her flowers upon a table of precious stones. Don Pedro bent his knee and kissed the thin hand.

"I bear most grievous news, señora. My brother is dead."

The lady looked at him calmly and then bowed her head, as if in resignation to the will of Heaven, yet in reality to conceal an emotion that almost instantly was gone.

In that moment the romance of her girlhood in sunny Spain was ended; days and nights of hide-and-seek with the terrible duenna, wherein a youth and a maid exchanged vows and pledged themselves to a life-long devotion. The vows were broken by designing parents and the two lives were never grooved together, but the pledges had lasted—how well, the lady alone knew. Life is full of these strange mad pranks of Fate.

"God made us, and we wonder at it," said the lady softly. Then she added quickly, "Be seated, Don Pedro."

The maid, passing the blaze of candles, pulled aside the tapestries and peered into the night. A mob was noisily moving by, the flare of their torches reflecting upon her, and their shouts of defiance against the demons reaching her ears.

"Marguerite!" called the lady sharply. "Nay, Don Pedro," she continued, "she is a trifle wayward at times and uncouth of speech, but a river that makes no noise is either very full or very empty, and she is a treasure. 'Tis I who should thank you for her."

"You are more than kind, señora," he answered.

"And to-night," she continued, as the maid sat down upon a footstool by her side, "we go to my humble plantation at Teneriffe, from whence we shall not return till these enemies be gone, or my husband is with me."

"Don Juan is in Peru?"

"*Si;* at his mines. He is always there at this season of the year, and doth not return till high mass."

"Could I be of assistance—your slaves—your valuables—your husband's interests—in what may I serve?"

"So like you, good friend, but naught remains undone. His Eminence came directly he heard your dread news, and hath taken charge. Marguerite," she added, "did he not ask you to help?"

"*Si*, señora, but my Nubian slave Beulah is so much stronger I sent her instead."

The lady frowned, and taking up a chalice of Peruvian wine, indolently sipped it.

"In which the little unbeliever," said a deep voice behind them, "hath shown me a slave whose willingness to serve could be copied to advantage by her mistress," and the Archbishop came forward.

The maid looked quickly at Don Pedro and then upon the floor, but the Señora Alvarez replaced her golden chalice abruptly upon the table, and picking up her fan, waved it violently to and fro.

"As usual, you are much to blame, Marguerite," she said severely. "When will you understand that God's spirit rests within our holy adviser, and that his presence is a boon granted to few?"

"Whatever you wish, I will do, señora," said the maid, so softly and sweetly that the lady looked down and half smiled.

Here the Archbishop stepped forward.

"Señora, the city grows restless, and my advice is to leave at once. The tide is high, your barge lies at the landing, and all is in readiness. There is at present a large amount of treasure guarded by a few faithful slaves and concealed only by darkness. One can not tell what may hap, and delay is dangerous."

Don Pedro arose. "I am at your service, your Eminence."

"Escort the señora to her barge," replied the Archbishop dryly, and then added, as the maid started to follow, "One moment, señorita!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE ARCHBISHOP

HE WAITED until the tapestries had fallen into place and then came quickly to her side as she stood by the inlaid table. His face was changed, and the usual expression of calm wisdom and deep piety was replaced by glowing fires of holy but almost fanatical zeal.

"Listen," he said, catching her wrist. "I

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am God's servant, and He is testing me through you. Christian arguments of the true faith have failed to convert you, and I fear His wrath do I leave my work undone. I am rich and powerful. *Si*, I am the most powerful man in Panama, not excepting our aged and stubborn Governor. Your bodily beauty is mockery to your ignorant soul, which needs the true light with tone and color to make it divine. Once these creatures from the Inferno are driven off, I shall take you in hand."

The maid wrenched her wrist from his grasp and backed away, a look of fear in her eyes.

"This is neither the time nor place, your Eminence, to discuss such matters," she replied, but her lips trembled.

"The Church knows not time, and is everywhere," he continued, coming close to her again and gazing earnestly in her face. "You can not understand. Do you realize *who* and *what* I am? Do you know how greatly you are in my power?"

"*A man of God!*" she interrupted, staring at him.

"Nay, I mean not what you think," he answered, a tinge of sarcasm in his tone. "'Tis your soul, naught else, I want, and that I will have. You fear me because I could carry you off—this night an I so wished—to our secret chambers of the Inquisition. Once within, your soul would be a toy, a breath of wind, vanishing through the casement ere it had entered. But I hope not to save you that way. I desire a free conversion. I would mold you to the finest thought of our true faith. Then I will have of you a saint—Saint Marguerite, and your portrait will be on the high altar of every church in the Indies. You shall be enclosed in a bower of blooms, your every wish granted—nay, anticipated. From your cloister you may rule not only Panama but the New World."

The maid edged farther away, but he caught her wrist again.

"I perceive the Devil within you, strong and firm. Prayers and persuasion are of no avail, so I'll torture him, bend and break him, and thereby send your soul to Paradise despite opposition. He knows of the water trial—the test by fire—the bite of our iron prongs, for he hath felt them often and he runs away, half drowned, aching, bleeding——" He paused and caught her by the shoulder. "God and our Mother shall have you—every inch, every atom of you! I swear it. Do you hear me, heathen maid? I, the Archbishop of Panama!"

"Your Eminence," she said, "I can stand no more." Her hands trembled. "Forgive me," she muttered, turning to go. At the tapestries she halted, still trembling, as he spoke to her quietly and coolly:

"Beware of God's wrath, little heathen. I do but try you. The Church needs must be fulfilled, and if we can not gain them one way, we must perforce try another. But remember, we never fail in the end!"

Again she started to go, but he held up his hand.

"Wait. I will attend. You are chastened somewhat of the Devil already. I can see it. The Jew whipped his son for winking the first time. The Church of God is more merciful."

He gained her side, and with a gentle smile escorted her down the stairs and out over the terrace into the garden in the rear.

By a small fountain they found Don Pedro and Señora Alvarez, while in the background stood two slaves bearing huge boxes.

"Child, a moment more and I would have left you behind," exclaimed the lady, catching her by the arm as the Archbishop proceeded with the Don. "Why do you tremble?" she added in surprise.

"I do not know," mumbled the maid, her teeth chattering, sick at heart with fear.

When the tide was out, the garden was shorn of its greatest setting, for the mud lay before it for nearly a mile, soft and unwholesome, but now the water was gently lapping against the green, and the large boat at the landing was rocking to and fro upon the ground-swell.

Don Pedro assisted the women aboard, where they took their places in the stern near the tiller, two lone, hooded figures upon a vast seat. Sixteen slaves manned the oars, eight to a side, with a tall, heavily built overseer at the tiller, armed with a whip. In the bow crouched a half-dozen negro women, huddled together in silence. Archbishop Perez had been among them, talking in a low voice, and now that all was ready he came astern and, making his salutations to the ladies, stepped upon the landing.

"Be of good cheer," he said, reassuring-

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ly. "In less than a fortnight I hope to join you with good news. Your husband's boxes will be secured aboard the *Santa Maria* ere sundown to-morrow. And you, señorita—think well on what I have said. Wilt have a pleasant countenance and open mind when next I see you?"

"I'll do my best, your Eminence."

The dark figure at the tiller gave an order, at which sixteen blades caught the water and with a sudden movement the boat shot out into the bay. The two men watched it silently, in the path of the yellow moon, until it became a mere speck and only the faint sound of oars came to their ears. Then they turned slowly away.

"The señorita hath given me new hope and fresh courage," said the Archbishop, after a pause. "But there remains grave danger. By and by is always too late."

Don Pedro looked quickly toward him. "What means your Eminence?"

"She hath not yet confessed."

"But she will in time," declared the Don eagerly.

"*Si*—so saith Señora Alvarez. Till now I have had no hope, but crumbs are oft-times good eating, and her parting gives me confidence to try again. The church is patient, Don Pedro de Luna, very patient, but it hath a limit. When next you see her, speak on 't. 'Tis a serious matter."

"*Si*, your Eminence. Much thanks."

The Don fell silent, in sudden fear of what might hap to this sweet morsel of maidenhood, not from without, but from within the walls of Panama.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

The Ayrshire and the Iron Car

How a new fangled invention saved two hundred lives

by C·H·Claudy.

MEMORIES of a horror are usually more highly colored than descriptions written at the time. One might discount the story of the storm of January 12, 1850, if it came from eye-witnesses, recalling at this far-distant date the blinding snow and the mountainous waves, but when the sober encyclopedia and the local histories both speak of this tremendous blizzard as of "unheard-of violence" and "beyond the power of words," it is a fair inference that it really was remarkable as a storm, even an Atlantic Winter storm.

The snow was both thick and whirled in great clouds by a terrific gale, which parted the white flakes one minute for a gaze far to sea, only to hide the waves themselves from those on shore the next. The cold was bitter, and the wind such that men had difficulty standing in it. To walk with a long coat or oilskins was impossible. The sea, according to description, was "such that no boat could live, no matter what brave hearts her crew might carry."

In this storm the British ship *Ayrshire*, carrying immigrants to this country, foundered and struck, two hundred yards from

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shore at Squan Beach, New Jersey. Government Life-Saving Service there was none at that time, such wrecking service as was done being managed by individuals and charitable organizations. The Government had not yet awakened to the need of coast-protection for its shipping, nor were life-saving devices perfected then as they are now. Of self-bailing, self-righting and buoyant life-boats there were none. No one had ever heard of power life-boats.

But—luckily for the two hundred and one people on the *Ayrshire*—one James Francis, who invented corrugated iron, had made what he termed a "life-car," which was stored in a shed near the beach, waiting some such opportunity for demonstration.

THE *AYRSHIRE* AND THE "CRAZY" CAR

THE life-car was not looked upon with favor by those stout hearts which had been accustomed to brave the sea in open dories, doing what rescue work they could with inefficient equipment and depending on high courage and strong arms to snatch live bodies from wreck and sea: it was "newfangled;" it was a "foolish idea;" it was "not strong enough or big enough" to do the work.

But on this twelfth of January not the stoutest heart that ever beat could take a dory through the breakers, nor any strength in human arms beat out to sea against such wind and waves. So that when John Maxon, "wreck-master," proposed using the iron car, there were willing if incredulous helpers in plenty to try the forlorn hope.

The car was dragged from its shed, the mortar made ready — the Lyle gun had not then been invented — and the round ball with its slender line rammed home. And if those on the shaking hulk six hundred feet away caught glimpses of activities on the beach, it is doubtful if they had either hope of rescue or comprehension of what was being done, for it needed no mariner to say this was no ordinary storm. The most ignorant of immigrants must have known that his chance of reaching in safety that new country he had come so far to seek was small, though but a short distance remained of the oversea journey. As for knowing what they were about—no one had ever heard of a life-car at that time.

But they knew, on shipboard, what to do with the ball and line when it came aboard, which it barely did, after several trials. It seems a peculiar coincidence that the utmost strength of powder they could exert was just so balanced by wind that the ball should fall directly on the deck of the *Ayrshire* and not short, or beyond; yet so it was, as after-events proved.

The light line yielded a heavier one, the heavier one hauled out a cable and a whip. Luckily the *Ayrshire* was stout and strong, and had struck too far in and with too much force to pound. She was safe enough for a short time, strongly built, and deep enough in the sand to form a firm support for the car and the ropes.

One can imagine the joy of the ignorant at having communication thus established with the shore, and the added horror to captain and crew, who knew well enough that neither breeches-buoy nor boat could live in that sea, cable or no cable. Nor would there be time for breeches-buoy work. There were two hundred and one of passengers and crew, many of them women and children, and the breeches-buoy takes one at a time.

AN AERIAL BEAN-POT

BUT meanwhile the life-car was bent into the whip and willing hands hauled it out. Nor was there hesitation about opening or getting into the queer contrivance —the little, flat-topped, round-bellied, corrugated iron pot, that looks scarce big enough for one, yet in which seven grown people can be packed through the tiny hatch, to be shut in helpless, sardined against the iron walls, chilled to the marrow and all but suffocated with little air. Yet there, those who use the life-car are safe from drowning, for though air can get in, water—in quantities—can not. For this is the merit of the life-car: suspended from a cable and hauled back and forth by hand, it rides either over the waves, on top of the waves, or through the waves, and at times all three, one after the other. The breeches-buoy drowns a man who is dragged through too much water, killing while saving him. To be safe over a bad sea, the breeches-buoy must be hung high. And here on the *Ayrshire*, with no masts left and a two-hundred-yard pull to shore, there was no way to hang the cable high.

So the little life-car made its first trip

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under the water, invisible and smothered in foam. You can be very sure it was quickly opened when it came to the beach at last, and the cheer they gave for the seven who were hauled out, almost frozen, stiff and pale with the pallor of too close an approach of death, has left an echo wherever the iron car is used.

TWO HUNDRED SAVED

NOT seven only, but over two hundred, did this, the first, life-car save that day. Twenty-nine trips it made through the impassable waves and the indescribable storm. For every trip, John Maxon tallied seven lives saved, save once only.

That was when some man—hero who gave his place to a woman or coward afraid to wait his turn, who can say now?—mounted the top of the car after the metal hatch was closed and left the *Ayrshire* clinging to the hatch. No one saw him go nor knew how long he clung, buffeted and beaten, on the perilous perch. The car came in as before, with seven within, who told of the man who could not wait.

The crowd on shore pulled and hauled on the ropes until their hands were blistered and sore: fast, fast, for the wreck was breaking up and the mass of immigrants seemed scarcely diminished on the low decks when a rift in the flying snow showed the *Ayrshire's* white, shrouded form to those on shore. To drag a heavy car six hundred feet out, against the swing of wind and wave, and then haul it home again, laden and low—no wonder their hands got sore and their arms gave out! Then John Maxon brought his oxen into play and the two plodding beasts walked uncomplainingly back and forth, back and forth, all day long, until the car had made twenty-nine trips and every last man, woman and child on board, save the one who could not wait, were pulled by main strength from a watery grave and set on shore, cold, shaken, frightened, but safe!

A RECORD RESCUE

THE Life-Saving Service has many brilliant rescues in its history and many a hero on its rolls. But never before or since this time have so many people been rescued from so bad a wreck in so terrific a storm. And this fact was recognized at the time: that here was a happening which was likely to stand unique for hundreds of years. So the little life-car, no longer new and shapely, but dented and buffeted by wave and sand and many heavy loads of human lives, was retired from active service, its honors won in this one day's work, and now rests, an object of curiosity and of veneration, in the United States Museum at Washington, for all to see who look.

The sand buried the *Ayrshire*, as if the ocean, cheated of its human prey, would at least take what it could. Thirty years after, the tide—perhaps the ocean forgot its vengeance!—uncovered the bones of the *Ayrshire*, and in them was found the ball which fell on deck, bringing the light line which spelled Life for two hundred. That ball, now suitably engraved, is one of the most, if not the most, cherished possessions of the Life-Saving Service, which grew with the years and necessity into its present huge proportions.

There are still life-cars in the stations of the Service. For many years after this demonstration they played a big part in saving life, and probably will again. Of late years, improved life-boats, better facilities for erecting and using the breeches-buoy, and finer life-saving methods have made its use less common. But it is always ready, the last resort of the crews when all else fails, and no matter what the conditions or how bad the storm, there is always the memory of this story and the *Ayrshire*—which every surfman knows—to prove that, be conditions what they may, while there is life to save and the life-car to save it with, there is still hope.

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The Capture of Lone Bill

by Hapsburg Liebe

OLD Eleazer Mott, ex-plainsman, driver of the old-fashioned stage-coach that connected Yellow Creek with a railway-station, turned to the man beside him.

"I told you I'd tell you about Lafe when we got started," he drawled. "It happened shortly after you left; it's been several years ago—seven, at least. Yellow Creek was young then, as you already know. The principal industry there was the Red Violet Saloon, and a good deal depended on how quick you was on the draw. Well, here's the whole story about our friend Lafe Dickson:"

AS I said, Yellow Creek was in its infancy, and about the only law we knowed anything of was the law of the strong arm and the quick trigger-finger—which you remember, of course. You'll remember, too, that there was only a double row of shanties, which reached from the scrub-covered hills above to the rocky plains below.

Well, the country got all riled up over the depredations of a lone bandit, whose name nobody knowed, and who we called "Lone Bill" for lack of something better. First jump out of the box, he held up a train, single-handed, and gathered in a hatful of money and jewelry from the passengers. Then he pulled off a job on the Tenville stage-coach, and a man who tried to draw in time got a bullet in the wing, and after that come a succession of hold-ups with one party on either side.

All who had seen the bandit said that he was a big man, with the swagger of a born rider, the eyes of a hawk and the quickness of lightnin' in his hands. Nobody'd got to see his face, because he kept it covered with a big blue handkerchief. He wore the regular toggin' of an out-and-out plainsman and carried an arsenal consistin' of two big Colts and a Winch. His voice, which never said, it seemed, more than "Put 'em up—quick!" was mighty bassy and gruff.

THEN the hand of the law stretched away out here and singled out a man, and named him sheriff on a big 'nickel-plated star, tellin' him to preserve the peace at all costs and orderin' him especially to get Lone Bill livin' or dead. Lafe Dickson was the man the law singled out. As you know, Lafe was big and strong, and a dandy shot; but also as you know, he was that easy-goin' and full o' fun that few people took him serious.

Everybody and his brother, as the sayin' goes, wondered at Lafe's bein' appointed sheriff of the county; we didn't even know how they had learned his name. Some of the citizens of Yellow Creek laughed and said it was done through charity for Lafe, and not because the law wanted Lone Bill; others said the law just wanted to keep Lafe out o' mischief by givin' him a steady job.

Lafe went straightway out to Tom Barmin's ranch, the house of which was not far away, to tell Tom's daughter Sadie the good news—for it did seem that Lafe was badly tickled over the appointment. If you've forgot what Sadie looked like, she was the prettiest girl in this part of the State. She was slender and rather small, but she was a real daughter of the West,

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and therefore made up in brains and pure nerve what she lacked in size.

She saw Lafe come walkin' up the path like a new-crowned king, with his badge shinin' in the sunlight, and went out to meet him, just as she'd always done. Lafe picked her up as he would have picked up a child, with his hands under her arms, and held her out before him.

"Sadie," says he, grinnin' like an alligator and noddin' at his star of authority, "if you'll marry me now, you'll be the wife of the high sheriff of this county."

The girl was, as I said, a real Westerner, and she looked pleased at Lafe's bein' an officer—I guess she thought it would rid him of the one thing she didn't like about him, which was his refusin' to see anything serious in life.

"But I'll wait," she replies, as Lafe sets her back on the ground as careful as if she was glass, "and see what kind of a sheriff you make before we get tied up in marriage-vows. I've got a notion," she goes on, smilin' as sweet as could be, "that you're goin' to get your metal tested when you start out to round up that one-man outlaw-gang that we style among us as Lone Bill. When are you goin' to begin the hunt for him, Lafe?"

"The—outlaw?" Lafe shakes his head and looks toward the ground. It was plain that he hadn't thought much about the business side of bein' sheriff.

"Sadie," he continues, with a twinkle in his eyes as he lifts them, "Sadie, suppose I get leaded in the effort to bring him in?"

"Is there anything worth while," asks the girl, "that hasn't a risk hitched to it?"

"Would you like to see me come in hangin' over the front of somebody else's saddle?" says Lafe, with his eyes still twinklin'.

"Of course not!" Sadie answers, lookin' pained and steppin' closer to him, and plantin' one little brown hand on his arm. "But you've already accepted the sheriff job and you must do your duty. I'd rather have to remember that you'd died doin' your duty than to have you, yourself, after you'd played the coward. Besides, Lafe, you—you need a little nerve-cultivation to go along with that splendid marksmanship of yours, which is bein' wasted idlin' around shootin' at spots for dimes. Since you've already accepted the place, I don't know that I regret it. You're the biggest man in Yellow Creek, and you ought to make good."

"But this Lone Bill," Lafe tells her, "is a regular devil. Life's too good to lose, especially after somebody about the size of you has come along to make it worth the livin'."

"But it's your duty to get Lone Bill," Sadie tells him again, with her voice mighty level. "And I might as well make it plain to you, Lafe, that I'll never marry you while he's at large."

Lafe starts like he'd been stung in the eye. He puts both hands on the girl's shoulders, and begins to shape a speech. But Sadie beats him to it.

"It's no use," she says. "Get the outlaw first. There's something more in bein' sheriff than wearin' a badge and there's something more in marriage than sentiment. I want to marry a man—a great big man. Good-by, Lafe!"

She broke loose from him and went into the house. Lafe went back to the shanty where he hung out, with his head on the droopy order.

WELL, that night the Red Violet was as full of tobacco-smoke as ever—and there was a little powder smoke in it, too, I guess, and there was the usual crowd of miners and cowboys hangin' over the bar and sittin' at the tables. In the middle of it somebody yelled,

"Fire!"

A house burnin' was a thing that Yellow Creek had never seen before. The miners and cowboys hurried out, and all of them piled up the street at a breakneck run, goin' toward the blaze, which was one of the last of the shanties toward the hills.

When the saloon was deserted, except for the owner, who himself was debatin' the question of shuttin' his doors and followin' the crowd, there stepped in out of the night a big man with a blue handkerchief over his face and a forty-five in each hand, both of said weapons being immediately brought to a dead line with Jim Elversett's heart.

"Put 'em up—quick!" bawls this newcomer.

"Say," objects Elversett, "you'll get into trouble here, you, Lone Bill! We've got a sheriff, now, and he——"

"Put 'em up—quick!" repeats the man

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behind the big, blued guns, interrupting Elversett.

So the barkeep lost all he had, which was several hundred bucks. Then the outlaw chucks the coin inside his blue shirt, backs to the door and disappears, his retreat bein' accompanied by the hoof-beats of a hoss.

When he had gone, Elversett locked up and hurried to the fire, which was beginnin' to die down. He found Lafe Dickson there, standin' among the rest and arguin' as to the direct cause of the first conflagration Yellow Creek had ever had. He runs up and grabs Lafe by the arm, actin' half loco.

"Here," he bellows, "I've been robbed—robbed—me, robbed! Big man with two guns, and he got all I had! First thing I knowed, he was standin' before me, tellin' me to put 'em up quick!"

"Yes?" says Lafe, seemin' rather took down.

"I put 'em up quick, of course, you lop-eared, reel-footed, make-believe sheriff, you!" Elversett goes on, as mad as a hornet. "Well, why don't you do something? Why don't you organize a posse and catch the outlaw and get my money back?"

Lafe grins in that slow, easy fashion of his and begins to look at the gapin' faces around him.

"That's who set this house afire," he announces. "He done it to draw the crowd from the Red Violet. But I doubt if we could strike his trail to-night."

The barkeep moaned when he saw that the crowd was not overanxious to go after Lone Bill. You see, they hadn't got enough of the Red Violet to last them until the next night. Lafe knowed mighty well that he couldn't make them go with him, even if he'd wanted them.

"It's no use to try it to-night," one miner tells Lafe. "He's got a hoss and he's done two miles from here, by this time. You'll have to work some sort of strategy on him, Lafe, set some traps for him, or put out pizen, or something like that."

WELL, the laughin' that had been done at Lafe when he got the sheriff job was soon turned to open sneers. Jim Elversett had a big followin', and he started a crusade of gibes at Lafe. Everywhere the new officer went, somebody asked him something about Lone Bill, if he was afraid of him and all that kind of guff. Lafe saw that he was goin' to have to make some passes, anyway, so he spent the biggest part of the day makin' out a map of the hills clean back to the mother-range, with an old plainsman for a helper.

And in the evenin' of the same day he went around to Tom Barmin's to see his sweetheart.

Sadie didn't appear to be very glad that he'd come. It was plain that she'd heard a good deal of the hootin' at Lafe for lettin' Lone Bill come right into Yellow Creek, with everybody awake, and put over a successful, shotless hold-up at the Red Violet.

They went to the bench that set against the side of the house and sat down.

"I'm goin' after him to-morrow, Sadie," says Lafe, tryin' to take one of the girl's hands—which same she pulled back mighty quick. "I'm goin' to start early, so I'm here now to tell you good-by. You see, I may never come back—unless it's hangin' across the front of somebody else's saddle."

Sadie Barmin squared herself around and commenced to look Lafe in the eyes like a professional hypnotist.

"Lafe Dickson," she says, "you are a coward! I'm not goin' to marry you, either—that is, until you capture the bandit and show me that you've got a little nerve."

"Why, Sadie!" Lafe's jaw hangs away down when he says the two words.

"And if you don't catch him," Sadie goes on, gettin' to her feet before Lafe, "I'll do it myself."

"Why, Sadie!" says Lafe again.

"We're not talkin' about 'Sadie,' " she tells him. "We're talkin' about this menace to the country, the outlaw. Until you've got him, Lafe, it's good-by."

She goes into the house. Lafe gets up and goes back to the shanty where he hangs out, and there sets in to cleanin' his rifle and short guns.

And the next day he rides into the hills, well armed and with water and grub to last him half a week.

He hadn't been gone four hours before the stage-coach that run between Yellow Creek and the railroad was held up by Lone Bill! The passengers shelled out to the tune of something like a hundred bucks. When the coach got in, and the people

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found it out, they set up a big howl with Lafe Dickson's name very prominent in it. It was lucky that nobody had been hurt.

LAFE come ridin' in a few days later, tired and worn out, with his water and grub gone. He was sand from one end to the other, and the dust was pasted to his face like flour on the biscuits a man makes. Everybody broke off from work when the news was passed around that the sheriff had got in. The miners crowded along the road that led to Lafe's hang-out, all of them yellin' and jeerin' at him. Even the greasers was makin' sport of Lafe, and the women stood in the doorways with their arms folded and laughed at him.

That is, most of the women. But there was one that laid on a bench against her father's house and cried very hard about it. She loved Lafe better than anything, and the people that talked about him was also talkin' about her, as she seen it.

Lafe just grinned at it all, but it was no hard job to see that there was something uneasy under the grin. He was really takin' it much to heart, and it was on Sadie's account, of course, more than his own. For there was no doubt that he liked Sadie as much, or even more, than she liked him.

Naturally, Lafe went to see Sadie as soon as he'd removed the sand and dust. He couldn't stay away from her when he had a chance to see her, it seemed. He found her with her eyes all red and her hair tangled up a little.

"I see you got him," she begins, then covers her face with her hands.

You see, she just couldn't make fun of him, mad as she was about his failin' to bring in the bandit.

"Now, don't!" says Lafe, turnin' red under the sunburn and tryin' to take her hands down from her face.

"Sadie," he goes on, sitting down beside her, "I want you to go back East with me. I'm goin' to chuck this sheriff job. My dad's got a little money, and he will give me a start. Will you go?"

Sadie gave him an answer that wasn't at all hard to understand.

"But, Sadie," Lafe insists, "this country is no place for you. There you can live in a city and have good things that you can't get here. It's nice there, Sadie. I lived there until I was eighteen, and I know. Will you, Sadie?"

Again did Sadie say "No!" And she adds with a good deal of spirit:

"I told you I wouldn't marry you until you got Lone Bill, and I mean it yet. If you can't succeed at that, I am sure you can't succeed at anything else. Why, Lafe Dickson, the outlaw is no more than a man, just like you, and maybe he is not even as big nor as good a shot as you are! He simply manages to get the drop on the people he robs. Why can't you manage to get the drop on him? Do you think, Lafe Dickson, that—that I'd—marry—anybody that—that everybody was la-laughing at? Why, you—you're the rag—yes, the *rag* of this town——"

Again she covers her face with her hands and snubs, while Lafe gets to his feet and begins to walk to and fro before her, lookin' like he has murder in his heart. But he couldn't stand to see her take on so. He raised his hat and started.

Sadie seen him between her fingers and called him back.

"Come into the house a minute," she says to him, takin' him by the arm with one hand and wipin' at her eyes with the other.

Lafe went in with her, wonderin' what was in the wind. She chased out the Mexican woman who served at the Barmin residence in the capacity of housekeeper, and set Lafe down at a little desk.

"Now," she says, pointin' to paper and pen, "you write out there that you've deputized me to arrest Lone Bill, the outlaw, and you do it quick."

"Why——"

"Never mind!" snaps Sadie, just like she owns him, hat, boots, guns and all—and I guess she did, to tell the truth about it. "You write it!"

Lafe started to enter another protest against the order, but Sadie made him bend right down to it. When he had finished it, she blotted it, folded it and put it in her pocket.

"Now," she says to him, "kiss me and go."

"But—but when are you goin' to start——"

"Don't you want to kiss me, Lafe Dickson?"

Lafe did—and he did!

"Now go," says Sadie.

And Lafe went.

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II

WHEN he had gone, of course thinkin' to himself that Sadie wouldn't set out on her wild-goose chase before the next day, why, the girl takes a hoss from the ranch, gets on it and heads for the hills above Yellow Creek. She had on one of her own blue shirt-waists; she wore one of the cowboys' Sunday hats peaked up high, under which she'd piled her long hair so well that you couldn't have seen enough of it to suspicion that she belonged to the feminine gender and she had her divided skirts well hid under a pair of very broad and bespangled buckskin chaps. You couldn't have told that she wasn't a man at a distance of two rods. You see, she was pretty badly sunburned, being altogether an outdoor girl.

She rode most of the night, as the moon was shining and the sky as clear as crystal, all the time looking for some well concealed little shanty in the scrub. She examined all the thickets she come across and rode through the little hollows to make sure. She had it in her head that Lone Bill would select just some such a place as them she searched for a hang-out when off duty.

The next day she spent roostin' on a high pinnacle, with her hoss hid below her, watchin' the surroundin' country for the man Lone Bill. It was a hard job. She had forgot the matter of bringin' a little water and some grub along, and she got pretty weak before the red-hot sun went down. But she stuck it out like an old plainsman. I tell you, the nerve that girl had would have done big credit to any man that ever lived in this world.

Her watchin' did not go without its reward.

Just about dusk she saw a strappin' big man come ridin' up through the little valley below her. He was humped over, busy with his hands above his saddle-front, perhaps countin' money—for there had been another stage-coach robbed that same day. She could see enough to make out the color of his hoss, which was the only black in the section—one he'd stole. And when she formed the conclusion that the man who rode unsuspectin' before her was Lone Bill, she was right.

Sadie crept down, careful as could be, and got on her own hoss. She was too far away to risk callin' on the bandit for a surrender, so she begun to ride down through the scrub, meanin' to come up suddenly on Lone Bill at a distance of about a hundred feet.

But the outlaw saw her a second too soon—he must have had eyes in the back of his head, for it was growin' pretty dark. He wheeled in his saddle with the quickness he was noted for and fired. Sadie's hoss crumpled, and then fell dead, pinnin' one of her feet under it so tight that she couldn't get it out.

But she was game to the last ditch, which she was in danger of findin' right then.

That Winch of hers begun to spout a regular stream of lead and fire toward the outlaw, who had slipped from his hoss and hid behind a rock that was a good deal too little to shelter him entirely. He replied with a vim, and it sounded like a young battle out there in the silent hills for a few minutes. If there had been good light for aimin', it wouldn't have lasted as long as it did—and it might have turned out different.

Bill's batteries let up first. Bill straightened on his knees, reeled and fell dead across the very rock he'd been hidin' behind, with his face turned downward.

JUST as Sadie was tryin' again to release her foot, meanin' to hurry back to Yellow Creek by way of the outlaw's hoss and tell Lafe to go and claim the honor, why, up rode Lafe himself. He'd been ridin' everywhere, huntin' for Sadie, and the sound of the shootin' had brought him hot-foot. He freed her from the dead hoss and took her up in his big arms, with the sheriff's star as close to one as it was to the other, and kissed her.

And Lafe knowed exactly what she'd done.

"Now, little girl," he says, "we'll go to Yellow Creek, and then I'll come back here and bury the bandit."

"And we'll tell them that you got him," says Sadie—but a little cold.

"No," Lafe objects, "we can't do that. I'll tell you later about that, little girl."

He'd already laid his plans.

Through the Mexican woman it had got out that Sadie had gone into the hills and had got lost. Every available man from the ranch was out lookin' for her—and, of course, in the wrong direction. The miners had added two and two together

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and had decided that Sadie had really gone to hunt Lone Bill for Lafe Dickson's sake, and most of them was at the ranch-house, waitin', by dark, on the night that the outlaw died.

After a while, Lafe come ridin' in, with Sadie asleep in his arms, clean worn out. As he appeared in the light of a lantern that set on the porch, they saw that there was—er, some crooked little streaks down through the dust on his face, straight below his eyes.

WELL, there arrived at Barmin's ranch house, at the same time, a special officer, old "Hip" MacDonald, knowed all over the West as the nerviest man-trailer that lived at the time, him and three deputies. They was out to help Lafe take Lone Bill's scalp, it turned out.

But the miners was too much interested in Lafe and the girl to pay much attention to Hip and his party.

"Coward!" one miner yelled, and the others took up the cry till the night rung with it.

"Who's a coward?" says this special officer, steppin' between the miners and Lafe Dickson.

"If you mean that it's Lafe Dickson that's a coward," goes on the terror to lawbreakers, "then you're away off, and only the presence of a lady prevents me from tellin' it plainer, you set o' bustheads. Lafe Dickson helped me to whip out the Mexican outlaw bunch under that demon of a Velinga, and he was my right hand, I tell you. He trailed down the four Selfords and got 'em, one at a time. I've seen him club his Winch with his back to a cliff and thrash a dozen greasers with knives, I have. Lafe Dickson is worth the whole caboodle of you, you bustheads, he is; and he's one of the cussed few men that old Hip MacDonald removes his skypiece to, by ——!"

Of course they'd heard of the Mexican gang, and of the four Selford brothers. When they recovered from their surprise and pushed forward, Lafe and old Hip was tryin' to see which one could shake the shoulder off o' the other the quickest.

Then Lafe turned back to Sadie, who had took all MacDonald's talk in, and introduced her as the getter of Lone Bill. And, sir, it sure did look like old Hip was tryin' to shake *her* shoulder off, too, when he heard it. But Lafe told them that Sadie was worn out, and led her into the house.

Sadie stopped him when he turned to go back.

"Lafe," she says, "I can never sleep until I know how it was that you didn't arrest the bandit."

"Sadie," says Lafe, "a long time ago Lone Bill done me a favor—a favor greater than savin' my life. Now promise that you'll never say any more about it."

Sadie promised, and she was so well satisfied that she cried a little over it.

Lafe went back outside, and told MacDonald good-by. You see, old Hip was due at some other point, as Lone Bill was no more. And the very fact that the special officer had taken Lafe's word about the outlaw was sufficient to elevate Lafe in the eyes of the miners. Also it was plain to them, then, that MacDonald had had something to do with Lafe's bein' appointed sheriff.

LAFE got on his tired hoss and rode back into the hills, goin' a nigh way and ridin' slow. The Yellow Creekers followed on foot, bound to get a look at the dead man, and Lafe was that torn up that he didn't know they was behind him until they offered to help him with the buryin'.

Lafe seems took back at seein' them.

"I—I'm not goin' to bury him, now—" he stammers, stoppin' because they had seen the face of the man who had played the part of a lone outlaw so well and had fell back like lightnin' had struck them.

Lafe knowed his purpose was in danger of defeat then. He knowed the miners had watched him all the way out and that he couldn't tell them thet he'd already buried the bandit. But he decided that he could trust them and also get them to help him carry out his big idea.

"Now, boys," he says, "I guess you all understand why I never arrested him, don't you? Listen to me, boys: We've already buried Lone Bill—and you helped me to do it, see? This man here, Tom Barmin, was killed to-day by Lone Bill—understand what you're to say?—and Sadie avenged the death of *her father*. Do you all get that?"

They got it. A few weeks later Sadie married Lafe, and they went East, to Lafe's old home. Lafe had chucked the sheriff job because he didn't want Sadie to be where there was the least chance of her findin' out what she'd done.

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A-Roving.

by W. Townend.

AS A GENERAL rule, a man is heavily handicapped in his judgment of a woman, even though he may esteem himself learned in the waywardness of the sex. For he—the superior being—can never hope to understand her, if she does not choose.

Whence this tale, which deals with a man and a woman, both fair specimens of their kind.

Jock Blair, the mate of the S. S. *Charlotte*, a tramp steamer, was a big man, burly and strong, slow in movement as in thought and speech, careless and good-natured. Also, though in many respects simple, he was no fool.

Nevertheless one might have had some reason for doubting this, in view of his behavior in regard to the girl at Mother Cuttlefish's.

When a man is thirty-four, he may reasonably be expected to have reached years of discretion.

That Jock Blair was ever susceptible to a pretty face is no excuse.

As a matter of fact, the whole affair was a mistake from beginning to end, an error on both sides. Jock had not understood the girl, naturally, but what was the more extraordinary, the girl had not understood Jock.

He often boasted that he had a head on his shoulders. To this the chief engineer (who otherwise does not come into the narrative) remarked on a memorable occasion, "Jock Blair says he's a head on his shoulders. May be—but his head is less good to to him than having no head at all would be to any one else."

As for the girl, she played the game according to the rules and lost, yet bore no malice.

II

CURIOUSLY enough, it was only by chance that Jock Blair had gone into Mother Cuttlefish's bar at all that night. Even at the threshold he had hesitated.

"Just one more drink, Mr. Blair," said Mr. Grogan, the second engineer. "Just one. Ar'm thirsty, un' it's early yet."

"I dunno," said Jock. "I dunno at all. I've had enough. If I have any more, it'll be too much."

"Why—you're not goin' to leave us, now!" demurred the second mate. "Surely. An' we've—we've not been into this bar, have we? It's the only place in Italy that we've not, seems to me."

"It's Mother Cuttlefish's. It's three years since I last saw her."

"Who the blazes is she?" said the second mate unsteadily.

"Well, speakin' plainly as man to man,

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she's an old woman. But a very poisonous old woman. And——"

"Oh! coom on," said Mr. Grogan, cutting the explanations short. "Do you mean to say you don't know Mother Cuttlefish? Thut settles it. We must go in un' have a look at her."

They walked through the bar into the smoky, stuffy, tawdry room at the back, crowded with men drinking at small tables, shouting and quarreling.

"That's her!" said the second engineer. He halted and nudged the second mate. Jock passed on to an empty table.

Seated on a large chair with her hands in her lap was a stout woman, dressed in black silk. She had a pale face, with a rolling chin overflowing a pearl necklace, black hair parted in the middle, a hard, tight-lipped mouth and eyes that beamed mildly upon everybody.

"Evenin'," said the second engineer. "How are you gettin' on, eh?"

The woman thrust out a limp, white hand, covered with rings. "Ver' good, how-a you?"

The second mate stared at her with his mouth open, as though fascinated, and the second engineer plucked him by the elbow.

"Glad to see you again," he said, and they moved away and sat down by Jock Blair.

"So that's her, is it?" whispered the second mate across the table. "Lord! I'm satisfied."

"That's Mother Cuttlefish," said Jock. "Can you believe it? She was a beauty once, so I heard tell."

"She'd give me the horrors if I saw much of her. She would that."

"Here, what'll you have to drink, eh?" said the second engineer.

A plump, dark-haired, olive-skinned girl took their orders and giggled at them coquettishly.

ANOTHER girl, with her back toward them, was seated at the piano at the far end of the room, singing and playing her own accompaniment. The song was popular and the audience thundered the refrain lustily.

"Who's that?" asked Jock suddenly.

"Dat! Oh! she—" The dark-haired girl set down their glasses, shrugged her shoulders in scorn and departed to another group who were shouting for more beer.

"—— her! She's taken all my change. Wull, canna' be helped."

"What did we want to come here for?" said Jock. "With all due respect to you, Mr. Grogan, it's a —— poor way o' gettin' robbed."

The music came to an end and the audience applauded wildly, as in honor bound.

"Good lass, sing us a real song now. Go on, Netty!"

"I sha'n't. Sing it yourself."

The girl left the music-stool and made her way down the center of the room, laughing, while the men chaffed her and drank her health.

Jock twisted around in his chair and stared at her as she drew near.

"Hullo!" she said, and seated herself on the edge of the table.

The three men looked at her curiously. She was slimly built, and wore plain black with short skirts, red stockings and shoes. She had nice features and a mass of heavy flaxen hair plaited in twin pigtails hanging in front of her low-cut bodice to the waist.

"Well," she said, after a time, "what's the matter? D'you think I'm a bloomin' scarecrow or what? Why don't you call me a sweet little thing or a dear little thing, same as most fellers? That's what gen'rally happens."

She swung one leg carelessly and, glancing at her reflection in a large gold-framed mirror, patted her hair approvingly.

"All right," said Jock smiling. "You're a sweet little thing. What shall I say next?"

From the very first, Jock Blair was weak.

"Won't you have something to drink?" asked the second engineer politely—an invitation which was regarded by every one as a matter of common courtesy.

She glanced at him from under her long eyelashes, then shook her head. The white-faced woman at the door frowned.

"Oh! changed my mind." She raised her voice. "Here, you!" and one of the other girls came over slowly.

"Tha same as last time, un' one for this lady," said the second engineer.

The girl on the table turned to Jock. "Not seen you lot before, where've you been? That boy's a bit—eh?" She touched the second mate on the back. He was resting his head on his hands, half asleep.

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"I'm not. I'm—I'm tired," he explained, with a stifled yawn.

"So'm I, but——" She screwed up her eyes whimsically.

The four glasses were placed on the table.

"'Ere's luck!" said the girl. "An' may we know each other better!"

"You're English, aren't you?" said Jock, wrinkling his forehead in thought.

"—— if I am!" she retorted sharply. "God help us, no! What makes you——"

"Wull, you're not Italian," interposed the second engineer, chuckling. "Ar know thut, as wull as Jock Blair does. Un' your hair is——"

"Is my own, anyway. There's others besides you rotten English."

Her voice was London all through. She was lying, obviously, therefore they forbore to ask her questions. It was nobody's business but her own, and it is not polite to doubt any one's word in a water-front bar at Genoa.

"Hullo!" said the girl. Mother Cuttlefish was beckoning. "That crazy old cat wants me for something. I'll be back soon."

She slipped off the table and crossed the room.

"Look here, let's be off," said Jock abruptly. "I can't breathe."

They got to their feet and walked out, saying good-by to the woman with the dead-white face and pale eyes.

"You come again, eh? Some odder night, eh?"

They could not see the girl anywhere.

"——!" said Jock, when they were once more in the fresh air. "That's an unclean hole, eh? They're all alike, the bars on the water-front."

"Old Cuttlefish is an old thief," said the second engineer.

The second mate sighed. "That's a nice girl. I wonder if——"

"I'm sorry for her, somehow," said Jock.

"Listen to Jock Blair!" said Grogan. "What makes you talk like thut, eh?"

Jock hesitated, then laughed awkwardly.

"I dunno', but she—she shouldn't be workin' for Mother Cuttlefish, that's why. I'm not goin' to that place again for you, Mr. Grogan, or the second mate or the old man himself. I sha'n't get the taste of that bilge out of my mouth till we're in the Black Sea."

The second engineer was seized with a brilliant idea.

"Thut's all right! We'll go into tha next bar we coom' to, Mrs. Happy-Dream's it'll be. Un' we'll——"

"Chuck it, Mr. Grogan, no! I'm sleepy. Let's go on board. 'Sides, the second mate's had sufficient for one night."

III

THE following evening, Jock went down to the second engineer's cabin.

"Comin' ashore, Mr. Grogan?"

The second engineer, in his shirt-sleeves, was standing at his chest of drawers, writing a letter.

"No, Mr. Blair," he replied, "it's sweating hot, but it's too wet."

"Is it?" said Jock. "Well, I hadn't noticed it myself. A drop or so of rain isn't much. I'm off for a walk, anyhow."

The second engineer put down his pen and derided him.

"Good-by, then. Give my love to the girl at Mother Cuttlefish's."

"I said yesterday," answered Jock, "that I wouldn't go near the place again and I mean it."

Notwithstanding this assertion, it was to Mother Cuttlefish's that he turned his steps, mechanically, without thought. He could give no reason for so doing, but he found himself outside the brilliantly lighted doorway and he was thirsty. Within, were drinks, of a kind. Nothing was more natural than that he should enter.

The back room was almost deserted, but Mother Cuttlefish, as though she had not stirred from her chair since he had last seen her, greeted him as he slouched past.

"Good evenin'," she said. "How-a you?"

"Evenin'," replied Jock shortly.

"You come again to see da leetle girl, eh?"

Her face was without expression, like a plaster death-mask.

Jock shook his head and, taking off his wet mackintosh, sat down at a table, angry with himself for ever having left the ship. He would take a drink, but one only. Then he would go.

"Hullo, Jock!"

He looked up to find the girl standing by his side, smiling at him.

"How—how d'you know my name?" he asked surprised.

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"I know a lot of things, and I'm not deaf."

Without being told, she brought a couple of glasses of whisky and a siphon from the outer bar and seated herself opposite him.

"This'll do, I s'pose," she said.

He handed her some coins, which she swept into her pocket without counting.

"No crowd to-night, eh, Jock? Too wet for 'em, I suppose. Thank the Lord!"

He sipped his whisky slowly; the girl did the same.

"Funny," she remarked, as one who made a discovery. "You get used to anything after a while. I can drink this now without feelin' sick. Once ——"

She snapped her fingers airily.

"Do you like it, miss?" said Jock.

"——, no! 'Ere, call me Netty or any other old name you please, except *miss*. Why it makes me think I'm a ——"

Here she was silent, pouting.

"Why d'you take it, then?" he asked pondering over her answer. He was slow at deciding what she meant. "Why d'you take it, eh?" He repeated his question.

"Why do I take it? 'Cause I've got to. See here, boy! It's for the good of the house an' don't you forget it. Or else——" her voice sank to a whisper, "she gets angry."

And the girl nodded wisely.

Jock followed her glance. Mother Cuttlefish sat motionless, a mummy, staring at the wall opposite.

A man shouted, "Hi, Netty! Get these filled, will you!"

She jumped up from her chair and went over to him.

Jock rested his elbows on the table and a fresh voice broke in.

"Hollo! how-a you, eh?"

One of the other girls had come into the room.

"I'm all right, miss," said Jock with much deliberation.

"You frien's no-a here, eh? You here to see-a me, eh?"

"They're on board the ship, miss."

He did not respond to her challenge.

"Ah!" She sniggered. "You love-a dat Netty, eh? Bah! she no-buono."

"I can't say truthfully that I'm loving any one," he replied.

The girl tossed her head, laughed and moved on.

"WHAT'S that girl been sayin' to you, eh?" asked Netty, sitting down by his side.

"Nothing much."

Jock stroked his chin reflectively.

"She'd better keep clear, that's all." Her lips tightened. "I'll have to speak to her, straight. Interfering again."

"You goin' to sing to-night?"

"No; too few here. I say," she spoke in a lower tone, "ask me to have another drink, Jock; she's gettin' excited."

Jock had no need to ask who the *she* was.

The glasses filled once more, the girl cuddled up to him with a little sigh, her head on his shoulder.

"You're a good sort," she said, patting his hand.

"What's up?"

"Nothing; I could sit 'ere like this forever."

Jock edged away uneasily.

"I suppose you have a pretty good time here, eh?" he said.

The girl laughed.

"What d'you think? Of course I do." Then she stared at him with a queer expression. "A good time, boy! In old Cuttlefish's bar, servin' drinks to sailormen!"

"Why do you stop here, then?" he asked, after a puzzled silence.

She shrugged her shoulders and made no reply.

"How long have you been here?" said Jock earnestly.

"Ah! that's telling. Not too long, though."

She was fingering the buttons on his jacket.

"What did you come here for, then? You're English, I know. But why this place, eh?"

"You're too curious, boy, a —— sight. Ask me some more questions, do! Ask me where I buy my corsets an' petticoats from. H'sh! some one might overhear me, an' where'd my character be? Awful if I were chucked an' couldn't get another respectable job selling liquor, wouldn't it?"

She made a pathetic little face at him and took hold of his hand.

"Lord! what a brown paw! What a big, ugly—— I remember when I was a kid at home. This little pig went to market, this little pig stayed at —— Oh, be ——! What the —— am I gassin' like this for?"

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She dropped his hand quickly, almost flung it away from her.

JOCK could not keep pace with her varying moods. He went back once more to "Do you like this place? D'you like it?"

"Like the place! Of course I do. I wouldn't stay here if I didn't."

Jock felt that something was wrong somewhere. The type was new to him.

"Tell me where you came from?"

The girl shook her head, and talked gaily, quaintly, of towns she had visited, of people she had known, of Mother Cuttlefish, of the other girls, of ships and the sea, and finished with, "No, boy, I won't tell you where I come from, not for love or money."

"Why don't you go home? I've asked you that before. Haven't you any friends or relations in—in London?"

"'Eaps of 'em, from Buck'n'am Palace downward. Whenever I come to town——"

"Got any money?" Jock was stubborn, not to be put off with transparent shufflings. When once he had fixed an idea in his head—that useless head—he stuck to it grimly. He wished to find out why the girl stayed on in a place she hated. Wherefore:

"Got any money, girl?"

"Chuck it, boy. Let's talk sense. Ah! there's that——"

A thin, sallow-faced man with a tiny black mustache was standing by Mother Cuttlefish, bending over her attentively, yet glancing across every few seconds at the girl. He smiled in an oily fashion, and waved his hand at her.

"See that feller!" she muttered. "I'll knife him, some day. I'd like to, I swear I would. The mean cur! Just think of it, boy! Makes me yell. Mother Cuttlefish is crazy on that chap; cracked on him. An' he's fooling her all over, up an' down. She fancies that he's in love with her. Just think of it! She wants him to marry her—she's had about three husbands already—but he keeps putting her off. Next year, he says, an' she's goin' to leave him all 'er money, every centimo. Money—she's piles of it, she has; an' property, too. She's the richest old woman on the quayside, that fat old lump there. Money enough to bury herself in. An' that thing over there'll get it, just 'cause he's a rotten liar. And old Cuttlefish is jealous, that's funny, ain't it? An' she'd kill me if I so much as looked at him—see him now, the beast!—an' he's always makin' love to me. I hate the sight of 'im, but—how's it going to end, boy, eh?"

Jock was silent. The girl's eyes were cast down. She drew in her breath quickly.

"You must get out o' this," said Jock firmly. "That's it; right, clear away."

He placed a big hand on her shoulder. "I say, Netty——"

"Yes, boy." She raised her face to his. The dark violet eyes were innocent and appealing under the veil of the lashes. Her lips parted slightly.

"Netty——"

He looked across the room. Mother Cuttlefish was leering at them, the sallow man was scowling. Jock stopped short, forgetting what he had intended to say. The thread of his speech had snapped.

"It's—it's getting late," he murmured lamely. "And I—I wonder if it's still raining."

The girl nestled close up to him.

"You're not goin' back to the ship tonight, are you?" she whispered.

"Of course I am," said Jock, frowning at his glass.

The girl shivered and played a devil's-tattoo with her fingers on the table.

"I must be off," said Jock suddenly. He stood up and walked slowly away.

At the door he turned. The girl had not moved. Mother Cuttlefish seemed to have fallen asleep. The sallow man had vanished.

Seized by a sudden impulse, Jock retraced his steps.

"Good-night," he said to the girl.

She sent him a little nod of gratitude. "Good-night, Jock."

Mother Cuttlefish opened her eyes. "Good-night. You come again, eh? An' bring-a your frien's?"

Jock passed without a word.

On his way back to the ship he heard footsteps hurrying after him.

"MR. BLAIR, hold hard!"

He stopped and the second engineer overtook him, panting.

"Ar've been huntin' for you, everywhere," he said. "The last bar Ar tried were Cuttlefish's. They told me you'd just left, so Ar had a glass un' chased after you. Ar didna' think you'd be there."

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"No, Mr. Grogan, I hadn't intended; but, somehow—and I didn't stir once I was inside."

Ten minutes later Jock slackened his pace and put into words something that had been troubling him.

"Mr. Grogan, you know that little girl up at Mother Cuttlefish's bar?"

"Ar do so."

"She's English."

"Ar could ha' told you that."

"Well, she shouldn't be there, workin' in that hole. We've got to get her back home again."

The second engineer gazed at him suspiciously as they reached a lamp.

"Why? Mother Cuttlefish's is no worse than any other place on the quayside, is it? Tha girl's well enough off there, I suppose. Those sort o' girls are all alike, anyway, you canna' trust 'em. If she thinks you've any money, she'll fool you; she'll——"

"She's not that sort, Mr. Grogan," said Jock. "You're quite wrong. I know from what she was tellin' me that she hates the place. Stands to reason she does. No nice girl 'd like a job like that, sellin' liquor to a crowd from off the ships."

"Aye," put in the other man. "But, see here. No good 'll come of it. Jock, keep oot, don't go mixin' yourself in what don't concern you. Un' we'll be oot to sea in a couple of days, so you've no time to do anything, whether or no."

"Don't let that worry you. I'll manage somehow and I'll help her home or my name's not Jock Blair."

The second engineer spat into the dock, then gave a curious laugh.

"Wull, if you're fixed on it, Ar canna' say anything to stop you."

"No," said Jock, "you can't. An' here's the *Charlotte*."

IV

SNOW the next day, early in the afternoon, fate and certain letters to the ship-broker's sent Jock Blair ashore. His errands completed, he loitered along in a leisurely way and chanced on the very person who had been occupying his thoughts since the night before.

"Hullo, boy! What're you doin', this hour?"

With no surprise, he discovered that he was staring at the girl from Mother Cuttlefish's bar. He took off his hat and she laughed.

"Well, say you don't recognize me, and I'll be 'appy." Then she reddened, an impossibility at any other time. "I look different, eh?"

She was bareheaded and dressed in a white blouse and white skirt, with a scarlet handkerchief knotted loosely around her neck.

"I was thinking of you," said Jock abruptly. His way was clear before him, he could speak to her now plainly, without interruption.

"Come an' sit down."

They were in an open space overlooking the harbor, set out with benches and flower-beds.

"What've you been thinkin' about me for, eh?" said the girl.

"You must go home, Netty."

He covered one of her small hands in his own.

"Jock, why don't I——"

"Yes, girl, you must get right away from all that crowd, Mother Cuttlefish, that dago and the rest of 'em. I can't let you stop on any longer."

Unconsciously he had adopted a protecting attitude toward her, and she trembled.

"You hate it, eh? I know you do, Netty. Then it stands to reason, if you wants to go, you go!"

"But Jock, that's all very well——"

"Look here, Netty, haven't you any *friends?*"

"'Eaps," she answered, and flashed her white teeth in a bewildering, unexpected smile.

"I mean at home—real friends; relations—that sort of thing."

"Oh! yes, s'pose so. Yes, of course."

"Why, then, why don't you go to them, girl? Come on, I'm trying to help you. I *must* help you."

"But—it's this way, Jock——"

"Is it money?" suggested Jock. "It is money. I said so last night. Lord deliver us! Is that all? D'you mean to say you stay on in this place because you've not got money enough to get home? How much do you want? I'm goin' to settle this to-day. I've got a certain amount on board and I don't spend much, so——"

"Lord!" said the girl. "I dunno; no idea."

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"Well, then, I'll find out the cost of landing you home fair and square, and I'll give it you to-night, Netty. Yes, and I'll see you off to-morrow, back to England; back home, girl, think of it! Away from Genoa."

He laughed happily, like a boy.

"Shall—shall I see *you* there?" said the girl, in a low voice.

"Of course you will. Of course. What d'you think?"

She glanced at him slantwise, with a curious flicker of her lips, as though searching for something lacking.

"You'll—have to give me a little time, Jock, to—to think things over. I can't quite believe it, Jock, it's so sudden."

She fanned herself with a handkerchief.

AN OLD gentleman with two pretty, well-dressed daughters passed by, laughing and talking.

They gazed at the man and the girl on the bench. One of them turned to the other.

"Those two look jolly, don't they? What perfectly lovely hair! I never knew Italians had hair like that. Isn't it ripping?"

The words came clearly.

Jock laughed.

"She's a bit off the mark, eh, Netty? I wonder if they——"

The girl flushed painfully.

"I 'ate that sort. They never mind whether you speak English or not. —— them!"

Jock leaned over her, his arm on the back of the bench.

"Don't worry about that, girl; that's nothing! You're going home to your friends. I'll bring the money to-night."

"When do you sail, Jock?"

"The day after to-morrow, girl, bound for ——"

"Jock, I'll wait till after you've gone, Jock. I'll go, Jock, but I'll wait——"

"That's a good girl! And when you're in England, you'll see me come dropping in on you, an' then——"

"You swear it, Jock?"

"I do, girl; I do."

She faced around on the bench and grasped the lapels of his thick blue coat.

"Jock, you're the—the best man in the world."

He reddened and shook his head.

"The only—only man who's had a decent word for me for—a long time, or who's treated me as a decent girl. I must pay you back some day, Jock—yes, and if——"

She half closed her eyes and raised her chin. "If you knew how I like you, boy, if you only knew! I'll be waiting for you, when you come. I'd be the first to meet you—if I could. I'm speaking the truth, Jock."

"That's all right, girl," said Jock hurriedly, and made a half-hearted movement to cut short her thanks.

"But, Jock, tell me. Why d'you bother about me?" She bent her head. "You know what I am? What's making you even look at me? Tell me."

She was playing nervously with the thick yellow plaits of hair.

And then Jock Blair, good-hearted but thick-headed beyond his fellows, gave his reasons plainly, without disguise.

"See here, girl!" He spoke gruffly. "It's this way. I'm—I'm not given to running after women. No, once it was different, but I'm anchored now, Netty, for good. When I saw you—I ——"

"Go on," said the girl, her cheeks rose-red, her eyes soft in the sunlight. "Go on, Jock; you——"

"IT'S this way; you're—you're very like—very, in some ways," he hesitated, halted, blundered, then rushed on with no idea of hurting, "like a girl at home. The girl I'm going to marry—the best girl in the world."

He turned his head and looked at the tiled roofs of the houses near by.

"You've the same hair, girl; and when I heard you sing, before I saw you even—it was her singing. D'you see, girl? And it come over me, all in a heap, what I'd feel if my girl had been servin' drinks in Mother Cuttlefish's bar. My God! girl, it hurt me. It gripped me by the throat, it did. When you crossed over and spoke to me, you were more like than ever; the same trick of speaking, the same smile. Yes, and I said to myself, then, that—that you must get away, at once, right clear away."

He stared once more at the girl by his side. Her color had faded, she was pale, her teeth pressed into her lower lip.

"That was it, was it, Jock?" She gave a harsh laugh. "I'm—I'm like the girl.

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Like—" She still played with the long, thick plaits. "I hope that the girl I'm like isn't like me. Well, I must be going, Jock, or she'll be raving mad."

She stood up quickly, brushing her skirts, and smiled at him wearily. "Don't get up, Jock. I've—I've got to buy some things for her, and I'd rather be by myself, please."

"Wait a bit," said Jock. "You'll go home, eh, girl? You'll go right away from this, back to your own people, won't you?"

He was standing up also. The top of her head was barely on a level with his chin. "I'll bring the money to-night."

She nodded. "Yes, Jock. I'll go. My people will be glad to see me again."

She hurried away, without a backward glance.

"I've arranged everything," said Jock to the second engineer, later on.

"You've what!" was the incredulous answer. "You've given thut girl——"

"The money? No, not yet. I'm going to bring it to her this evening, and she's going home."

"You're a —— fool, Jock Blair! Aye, thut's what you are. Bigger 'n Ar thought you were."

V

JOCK BLAIR walked up to Mother Cuttlefish's bar that evening, declining all offers of company.

Once again, as on his first visit, the room at the back was crowded with customers, shouting, drinking, smoking and singing.

Mother Cuttlefish nodded as Jock entered. By her side was the sallow man, whose hand she held.

Jock did not see Netty at first, until she stood before him, in her black dress and cheap jewelry, with her cheeks and lips very pink and her eyes very bright.

She put down her tray on the table, which was unoccupied save by Jock and a man who sprawled in his chair and snored drunkenly.

"Hullo! You're lookin' pretty gloomy to-night, Jock. What's the trouble?"

"Nothing," said Jock.

He glanced around cautiously and tapped his breast pocket. The girl smiled at him.

"You'll have the sus-same as usual, eh, Jock?"

She brought him a glass of whisky and then, seating herself by his side, threw her arms around his neck. He was startled, but made no comment. She pressed her cheek against his with a foolish laugh.

The sallow man was sneering. Mother Cuttlefish mouthed and chuckled like a white parrot.

"But, Netty—" Jock touched one of the yellow plaits gently.

Some one at the other end of the room began to shout, "A song, Netty. Come on, you've got to sing!" Others joined in the uproar. "Sing us a song, Netty!"

"Don't, girl, no, don't," said Jock. "Please!"

As though his entreaty had decided her, she stood up and rumpled his hair with her fingers.

"I say, Netty," he whispered. "I've brought the money."

"That's all right," she said. "Good boy."

She went to the piano, amid yells, and struck a few chords, haphazard. A moment's indecision, and she began to sing.

Jock Blair looked up, his brick-hued face grim and wrathful.

"In Amsterdam there dwelt a maid,
Mark well wha-at I do-o say;
In Amsterdam there dwelt a maid
An' she was mistress of her trade."

Jock shivered.

She turned her head:

"Sing up!" and the men sang the wailing melancholy chorus, that tells of parting and good-by, of love changed to hate, of women left to mourn.

"And I'll go no more a-roving
With you, fair maid.
A-roving, a-roving,
For roving's been my ru-i-n.
I'll go no more a-ro-o-ving
With you, fair maid."

But Jock Blair shut out the rest of the song with a big finger in each ear.

The music stopped and the girl stood up, slim and straight, her hands behind her back, with the gaslight shining full on her golden hair and her lips parted in a mocking smile as she looked at the crowd.

"Good girl!" The men clamored for more.

She shook her head, laughing, and came down the room toward Jock.

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"Give 's a kiss, girl," shouted a man. "Come an' sit here."

"Go to the devil!" she answered, and passed on.

Jock stared at her queerly.

"Well," he said dryly. "You——"

"Did you like my song?" she asked.

"No, I didn't an' you know I didn't," said Jock. "You shouldn't have sung that chantey."

She bent down and whispered:

"Go into the front room, Jock; I want to speak to you."

JOCK, his brain a-whirl, stumbled out. Mother Cuttlefish showed her pale, mild eyes as he passed.

"You no go-a, so soon, eh?" she said.

The sallow man stroked her hand and glared hungrily at the girl.

Netty followed the sailor into the empty bar.

"What is it?" he said.

"Jock," she said, "have you bub-brought—Lord!"

She put her hands on his broad shoulders and giggled.

He fumbled in his pocket stupidly and produced a small leather purse.

She snatched at it, her eyes blazing.

"You've——"

"That's to take you home, girl. That's to get you away from Genoa."

"That's all right, Jock." Then she broke into a fit of hysterical laughter and leaned against the counter. "'Ere, do you think I'm goin' —goin' to take your mon-money?"

Jock looked at her without answering, only half comprehending. He was dense at the best of times.

"What's the matter, girl? That's to go home with; home."

The laugh died away and the pink lips grew tragic. "Ye-es, o' course. Ho-ome, eh?"

She stood upright, away from the counter.

"Boy," she said gently. "Boy, you're a fool and I'm a fool, too. I thought—I thought it was on acc-account o' mum-me; yes, Jock, me. I was mad, eh? I thought you cared, that you wanted me out o' this place for myself. You don't like me, I know; tha-at makes it all the kinder. No, I mean it, Jock. I'm not goin' 'ome, no Jock, not a step. Why should I? Do you think I don't like this place? O' course I do. I must have food an' drink an' all that. I can't have you, so—I'll go no more a-rovin', eh? I'm glad you're going away, Jock. Good - by. I b'lieve you meant well, but you're rather a mum-mug, aren't you! 'Ere's your money!"

She thrust the purse into his hand; he took it mechanically.

In the back room they were singing the latest music-hall song out from home, bellowing at the tops of their voices.

"But, Netty," stammered Jock Blair. "I don't know exactly what to say, I never——"

"Oh! that's all right—that's all right!"

"Isn't there anything I—I can do? Wouldn't you——"

"No, Jock, there's nothing. Now, clear out, or I'll be mum-making a fool of myself an' how-owling."

Mother Cuttlefish peered into the room, opened her mouth as though to speak and then drew back again.

"There's that old——"

"Don't mind her!" said Jock. "Netty, you must come home. You've got to leave——"

"Oh! for God's sake, give it a rest," whimpered the girl. "Nun-now, you've gone an' sus-spoilt everything."

She was crying quietly, her head on his chest.

"Yes, sus-spoilt it all."

She looked up at him, the tears making furrows through the powder.

"Good-by, Jock, good-by. I dud-don't want—want to go 'ome. I'd rather stay 'ere."

She drew his face down to hers, and kissed him on the lips twice.

Then she pushed him away from her.

"Now, go!" she said. "Please, go!"

At the door leading to the street he paused, a dull pain gnawing at his heart.

The girl was sitting huddled up at a table, her head buried in her arms. Mother Cuttlefish appeared at the far end and spoke to her sharply. Jock Blair, dazed and bewildered, incapable of coherent thought, walked away, gripping in his hand the small purse.

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The Vicarious Outlaw.

by

Eugene P. Lyle, Jr.

GOING to the depot, young Sanderson, who on his cards was Mr. F. Crittenden Sanderson, met Aleck Schindler, and cheerful Aleck inadvertently started the whole adventure.

Schindler was an older man, schooled in bucket-shops and pool-rooms, but not for that would young Sanderson, recent university graduate and now home in Kansas City, in business with his father, concede to him a nimbler art in taking care of one's self against the world.

Schindler dropped to a seat alongside in the cable-car, and lightly kicked Sanderson's expensive suit-case.

"Leaving town, looks like," he observed.

"Just down to Texas for a few days. Business, you know," young Sanderson replied casually. He did the casual very well.

Yet there was something likable about the boy, and Aleck meant to be helpful.

"Better try a scalper before you buy your ticket," he suggested. "Easy way to save a few dollars. But," he hastened to add, "I guess you're on to all such ropes."

Young Sanderson looked what is called "wise," and Aleck shut up and soon after swung off with the theater-crowd.

The emptied car with young Sanderson duly plunged over the crest of the Ninth Street incline and on down into the murky gulf of the Bottoms. Black were the Bottoms, except Union Avenue. Union Avenue, opposite the Union Depot, was enticingly aglare. Along that Yellow Way, in that lurid age, neither saloon, chop-house nor auction-room knew the respectable night-time lull in activity of which a front-door key is the symbol. Nor yet did the scalpers—the scalpers not of the wayfarer, but of the price of a railroad ticket.

YOUNG SANDERSON drew up at the curb before a red-and-black bulletin-board. It was Union Avenue's geographical bill-of-fare then being served: Omaha for $6.80, Chicago for $9.50, Los Angeles for $22.65; any platter of mileage at a bargain. Sanderson set his lips to a kid-me-not severity, and went inside.

Had they anything for San Antonio, he inquired; for San Antonio, Texas?

"San 'Ntone?" repeated the man. "Cheese it, cull," he begged, in the lightsome slang of the period. "And why don't you ask if we keep open at all?"

He was a profoundly hurt broker as he turned to a multicolored ticket-rack, and drew out a bunch of long amber-tinted tickets. Riffling them with a pudgy thumb, he stopped at one and cast a calculating squint aslant at his customer. The squint revealed all he desired to know.

"If here," he exclaimed, drawing out the ticket, "ain't what's real nifty! Goes gorgeous with a pink complexion. Try it on at the mirror if you want. And say"—he lowered his voice stealthily, "it's two-eighty less 'n they'll crimp you for over at the depot. O.K., eh? Want it wrapped up or delivered?"

Frowning with dignity, young Sanderson in his wisdom examined the ticket.

"See here," he said doubtfully, pointing to the contract side, "those letters stamped there, 'U. S. Govt.,' what do they mean?"

"Say," pleaded the broker, "I wisht you'd stop stringing me. Anybody who shows travel as much as you knows well

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enough that the Government's stamp on a ticket means that it's an army officer's ticket."

"Won't I—uh—won't I have any trouble with it?"

"Trouble?" The scalper's look was full of reproach. "All right, make a monkey of me if you want to, for I know I'm only telling you what you know already. But here goes. Some captain or other, we'll say, is ordered from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Houston down at San 'Ntone, see? He gets this far and stops off to change cars and he finds a wire waiting him, ordering him somewheres else. What then? Well, he comes in here and sells me what's left on his ticket. Just what them officers call their perqui-sites, see? And here's the ticket. No name to sign or nothing. You buy it, and the conductor, the whole train-crew, will think you belong to the army. They'll show you every courtesy in the shop. Heavins, brother, that ticket's worth more 'n the regular rate, while you get it for——"

Young Sanderson bought the ticket.

II

THE Katy's nine-five was made up and waiting under the dismal train-shed. Sanderson's ticket was not questioned. Yet, when the conductor's eyes caught the legend stamped on it, they instantly fastened on the holder of that ticket. There was an uneasy sort of respect in the look and Sanderson rather liked it.

As he mounted the steps of his car, he knew that the conductor was whispering something to the Pullman conductor and he heard the latter exclaim, "Whew, no! Is he?" And then the train-conductor pointed out a half-column article from Leavenworth on the front page of that afternoon's *Star*.

Yes, young Sanderson liked it. Unconsciously he filled his chest as he followed the porter to his berth. It was gratifying to be more than a mere ordinary unit of transportation. He was an identity. Perhaps, because of his ticket, they recognized in him an army officer known to be engaged in a dangerous mission. Going down the aisle, he straightened with military precision.

However, from being simply impressed, the young man would have been stunned by his own importance had he peered through the curtains of his berth that night. Down the dim aisle, between the faintly swaying draperies, he would have seen, on a collapsible stool, a collapsible negro porter spasmodically blacking boots. He was a scared darkey, all right. His eyes rolled incessantly toward Sanderson's berth. When the train jolted or the air screeched through the brakes, he grabbed panically at a cheap bulldog-revolver among his brushes. There was exactly one pair of boots well blacked that night. These were Mr. Sanderson's.

In the Indian Territory next morning, after his breakfast, Sanderson became aware of a girl in the section opposite his own. He had returned for his pipe, but now he sat down instead to read the *Atlantic Monthly*. Something pleasing had been added to the surroundings, to the atmosphere. Young Sanderson was not a masher. Moreover, he hardly identified the pleasant something with the plump and rosy-cheeked person across the aisle. The possibility, even desirability, of scraping acquaintance with her, did not occur to him. She was satisfying the way she was, like a picture or poem or song or breath of Spring, which one thanks for a delectable state of mind.

Yet, as he read, he liked to fancy that she was looking at him, growing interested in him, seeing him as he saw himself. The young fellow had his dreams and dramatized himself and craved an audience, especially if it had rosy cheeks. He glanced around. She was idly gazing out the window. Her plump chin was propped on a plump little hand. One little tan shoe with wide silk bow swung cozily as she contemplated the Indian Territory. Her profile was tan again, with peaches blended. Her long lashes were demurely and saucily eloquent. Having her there made reading delightful. Nay, it made reading the semblance of reading, for he caught himself wondering what her eyes were like.

THE train-conductor, passing through, surprised his glance at her and scowled in a sudden and ugly way that nettled him with a desire to fight. Then his fastidiousness of a young collegian was rasped to the quick, for he heard this railroad conductor address her as one

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addresses an old family friend. And she, moreover, replied in kind, with a friendliness as sunny and bright and welcoming as her own broad Kansas prairies. She was even making room for the conductor-person on the seat beside her.

Sanderson gathered that she had boarded the train after midnight, at Parsons, a junction-point, a town of railroad offices and shops and yards. She lived there. So did the conductor and probably the rest of the train-crew.

The brakeman touched his cap as he passed, and said, "Morning, Miss Molly," and she nodded back, smiling.

"She's probably some conductor's daughter," thought Sanderson. She spoke of meeting her father down the road and coming back with him. She was just out "for a little stroll." Her voice rang with a clear, sweet heartiness. But precise and very young Mr. Sanderson felt that he could no longer approve of her. A good fellow with conductors, brakemen, et cetera! He waded out of the *Atlantic*, not being in deep anyway, and he fastened his teeth on his pipe and strode forward to the smoking-compartment.

He had a long morning of it. They did not cross the Red River and pull into Denison until two o'clock. Here travelers had an hour for dinner in the station restaurant, but Sanderson used a scant twenty minutes. He stopped at the telegraph-window and wired his father that he had arrived thus far on time. It was a perfectly useless proceeding, but it smacked of weighty business and F. Crittenden could not refrain from going through the motions.

To while away the remaining time, he sauntered up the ridiculously wide main street of the town, past false two-story fronts, hitching-posts and raw-whisky saloons. He observed the inhabitants with what he imagined a sociologically observing eye, yet at heart he was on the alert for the charm of a Woolliest West and of good red blood—blood that, unsuspected, called for its own in his own veins. But real-life drama is only sporadic, and is not perennially on tap for casual Pullman tourists, and this was not Denison's day for being woolly. Abruptly Sanderson looked at his watch. He had five minutes to get back to his train.

When almost there, he heard the locomotive whistle, and broke into a run. On the steps of the Pullman he saw a chubby little miss in tan suit, tan veil and rakish Panama hat. She was the Kansas girl and she was saying good-by to a cluster of Denison girls. Very exclamatory and prettily excited they all were about it. The conductor signaled to the engineer to go ahead, but in the same moment the Kansas girl perceived Sanderson sprinting desperately. She called to the conductor and pointed to Sanderson.

The conductor was of two minds about holding the train, but when she screamed "Please!" at him, he sprang to the platform and pulled the emergency-cord.

The Denison girls made way for Sanderson as he came lunging aboard. He felt their eyes on him, as if he were a football hero going into a big game. Again, as he passed the Kansas girl on the steps, lifting his hat and murmuring "Thank you," he was startled by the consuming curiosity in the look she gave him.

"I'm a somebody, that's certain," he muttered inwardly, "and everybody seems to know who, except me. Deuce take a scalper's ticket, anyway!"

III

THEY had changed conductors at Denison and the new conductor was big-shouldered and formidable. He half blocked the door of the car as Sanderson made to enter.

"What you been telegraphing about back there?" he demanded. There was a lurking savagery in his voice and his hand was on his hip-pocket.

"I fail to see," stated young Sanderson, "that that is any concern of yours."

"Ain't, eh? Well, anyway, Cap, you be mighty careful. Recollect now, mighty careful."

The pupils of the young man's eyes grew small.

"I'd advise the same for you!"

He put it succinctly and the Kansas girl, passing him to enter the coach, drew in her breath with a little rapturous gasp.

"Now suppose," he went on, "you explain——"

"Passengers not allowed on the platform. Git on in."

Sanderson got on in, reasonably content with forcing the conductor behind the rules

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of the company. In the corridor a heavy, hard-jawed man of about thirty was coming out. Sanderson stepped back to let him pass and then he felt the man's bushy brows and steel-gray eyes bent on him. He flinched involuntarily. There was something baneful in the man's deliberate scrutiny.

"So," said the man to the conductor behind Sanderson's back, "telegraphing to Kansas City, was he?"

The conductor grunted. "Oh, you've got the right tip all right, I guess."

Young Sanderson went into the coach, psychically blinking. And here, after the conductor, the bushy-browed man, was the Kansas girl again. She was evidently watching for him. She was looking over the back of her seat, tense in anticipation, as if momentarily she dreaded to hear pistol-shots. But, with the first glimpse of him, she settled hastily into her seat.

He felt that he owed her a more formal acknowledgement of her kindness in holding the train for him. Besides, he was the soul of punctilio, and he paused at the arm of her seat.

"I beg your pardon," he began, "I——"

The start she gave and her manner of turning to face him made him suddenly hostile.

"Gad," he murmured under his breath, "she thinks I want to flirt with her!"

But, as he looked down into her frank brown eyes, the eyes of a good playfellow, he knew himself mistaken. She was not resenting his speaking to her. She reserved judgment as to that. And yet she was strangely disturbed, unaccountably startled. Sanderson hastened to get his little formality over with.

"Permit me to thank you—" he said, "for holding the train, you know. You have kept me from missing an appointment—a business appointment. I——"

To his amazement, she caught at his words.

"*Appointment?* Business appointment?"

A little quiver, of fright or of ecstasy, passed over her.

"Oh, how cold-blooded! How perfectly cold-blooded!"

"I don't see—" he began.

"But *I* do, and I can tell you that it would be better for you if you had been left behind. And you needn't thank me, either, particularly as you have to unbend so to do it. I was pleasing myself. I didn't want you left behind."

"Great Cæsar, why?"

"Because I wanted to—to see the rumpus."

"Rumpus?" he murmured hazily. "Pardon me, what rumpus?"

"You know well enough." Her eyes lingered for the briefest impudent survey of him. "And I don't believe," she added, in her honest, ringing tones, "that I'd be so conceited about it, either, if I were you."

He endeavored not to writhe. He frowned down at her. Her nose upturned at him. They tried terrifically hard to hate each other.

She relented first, in a way. He seemed so tragically young; almost, she supposed, as young as herself, and her own youth shuddered for him.

"Listen," she said, though bating none of her scorn, "you needn't mix in. Well then, don't. Dear me," she burst on him angrily, "there's no sense in being a fire-eating young idiot. Not a bit, and you must stop it. Stop it for good, do you hear?"

"Really," he stammered, "this is beyond me. I'm all astray. I really don't——"

"Don't you know," she interrupted, her voice sinking to a whisper, "that the baggage-car is full of deputy marshals? They got on at Denison and they're armed with sawed-off shotguns. They—— But here comes the conductor. Quick—oh, please go back to your seat!"

Her distress was so evident that he could only obey. The conductor's formidable bulk passed through, and after him the bushy-browed man, and then Sanderson rose with his magazine in hand and flung the magazine down hard.

"It beats the Dutch," he fumed, "it beats the Dutch!"

He started toward the girl again, but she shook her head imperiously and nodded toward the back of the car. There was only a lone woman passenger and another woman with a child, unless one counted the brakeman, who had dropped quietly into a rear seat and was reading a paper. Yet it was the brakeman indicated by the Kansas girl's nod.

"— the Dutch!" Sanderson babbled.

He sought refuge in his pipe, but before turning into the smoking-compartment he

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saw, outside on the front platform, the conductor and Bushy Brows, conferring earnestly together.

IV

IN THE smoker, Sanderson dropped wearily into a wicker chair by the window and gazed with a lugubrious frown on a darkening landscape. Low, gathering clouds were bringing on an early dusk. Two other passengers occupied the settee in front of him. One was a cattleman returning to his ranch in the Gulf country; the other a flashy, flabby, pasty-jowled young fellow with short-cropped hair, who was branded by a diamond, a red and yellow tie and a leer as of one well-known breed of brazen drummer.

The brazenness, however, was not now apparent. The leer was only a craven smirk. He talked to the cattleman in nervous, unsteady tones. The cattleman, a lank, roughly prosperous man of about fifty, was amused as he listened, or put in a word now and then, and yet at times he was very grave and even rather grim.

"'Long somewhere the other side of Waco, t'awds midnight, 'd be where they'll likely try it," the drummer was saying. "And," he croaked, in the hoarse chest-tones of the doomed, "I gottuh go beyond there. I gottuh go far as Austin." He mopped his pasty face. "——, I've a notion to stop off at Dallas. We get there for supper. Even crawling under a seat ain't safe. Ain't sure I could, neither, I'm so dinged fat. Yeh, Dallas sounds good and gooder all the time. You don't know, I reckon, that my sample-case there is full of novelty jullry. My line, yes, sir; for a Maiden Lane firm. ——! If they got that sample-case—— Not muchee! Me for Dallas!"

The cattleman grunted indulgently. He had just marketed a train-load of range stuff at Kansas City and his wallet was heavy. Still, he did not think of stopping off at Dallas. He was worthy of his wallet.

"Them United States marshals ahead with the baggage——" The drummer checked himself and sneered. "Honest now," he demanded, "what show they got if it's Pete Rogers out there in the brush again? Eh, what? Why, lemme tell you, Pete 'd as lief stick up a car full o' deputies as he would a second-hand clothing dummy. Yep, that's Cap Rogers for you, my friend."

Rogers? Pete Rogers? Sanderson was all ears. Pete Rogers! The enigma needed only that gaudy young desperado to make it bristle like a basket of daggers.

Sanderson's reserved aloofness wilted as a starched collar. He turned to the drummer.

"But," he objected, "Rogers hasn't been heard from for a year or more, at least in the papers."

The drummer regarded him pityingly, even resentfully.

"Say, friend, I reckon you been leading the sheltered life. Eh, what? Or you'd know Pete's been doing time for eighteen months past and that his time's up. Got him for concealed weapons, or something. But not for the real goods, no, sir. Pete was too slick. And now he's out, and his old gang waiting for him. And it's this here night they cut loose again. And we're elected; this here train we're on is elected. The marshal got wise to it at Denison, and smuggled on them deputies. He's li'ble to make Pete mad, acting that way."

SLANT lines of rain broke against the window, so that it was a blurred curtain. The drummer leaned across Sanderson and jabbed a sausage-like forefinger at the button. The porter came in a flurry of promptitude, looking toward Sanderson.

"Light up, George," said the drummer. "It's as gloomy as a wet cave in here."

The porter's manner changed. "Huh, was you de one what rung like fury thataway?"

Sanderson looked up.

"Never mind who rang," he said. "Let's have some light."

"Ya-yas, sir, Cap'n, please, sir. In jes' a secon', Cap'n," and out he ran for his ladder and taper.

"That nigger," observed the cattleman, "he 'pears to be right respectful to you, son."

Sanderson half laughed. "I believe he thinks I am an army officer."

"Anybody," returned the cattleman with curious insistence, "that looks good for two bits is captain to a nigger porter."

"Yes, but the whole train, including the conductor, seems possessed with the same notion."

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"Why so, son?"

Sanderson flushed. The Government stamp on his ticket would have explained it all, but he did not wish to confess to riding on a scalper's ticket. His confusion did not escape the cattleman, particularly as the gas was now lighted overhead, and into the cattleman's thoughts came again the responsibility of a heavy wallet. He bent an interested gaze on this fellow-passenger.

"Why so?" he repeated quietly.

Young Sanderson glanced at the man's lank jaw and met the capable look in the man's eye. Here, if anywhere, was the man for his riddle.

"Never mind why so," he replied, "but I *can* tell you that I am *not* an army officer."

"Nor," said the cattleman, half rising out of his seat, with hands ready to take Sanderson by the wrists at the first move, "nor any other kind of gunman, maybe?"

Sanderson nervously fingered the pearl drop in his very correct tie. He had sensed the calm menace in the man's tone, but he stifled the hot retort on his lips. He needed this man's collaboration on the mystery.

"No, I am not a gunman," he laughed, "and here is my card."

The cattleman glanced at the card.

"Kansas City, eh?"

"Yes, I left there last night."

"In which case," said the cattleman, "maybe you've got some letter or other which come to you through the mail as late as yesterday?"

Sanderson dug into his pocket and brought forth an invitation to the Priests of Pallas ball, which had reached him the afternoon before.

The cattleman looked at the address and postmark.

"It's a right proper alibi," he admitted. Slowly a shamefaced grin broke across his lantern visage. "There now," he mused aloud, "I might 'ave seen all along you're only a pink-an'-white yearling. The idea, son, o' my getting the notion that you was——"

"Who?" asked Sanderson.

"Who?" asked the pasty-faced drummer, stirring in his seat.

"Why," roared the cattleman, "Pete Rogers, of course!"

The drummer looked disgusted.

Sanderson stared. "You thought that *I* was Pete Rogers?" he fairly exploded.

The cattleman was in a convulsion of dry mirth. He only nodded his head.

"Pshaw," said Sanderson, "what utter nonsense!"

The cattleman stopped chuckling. "Now, I dunno about that, son." He became grave. "You don't happen to know, maybe, what's being whispered round this train? No? Well, it's being whispered that—hear me, now—that Pete Rogers himself is aboard!"

Sanderson caught his breath, at least enough to murmur, "Oh, pshaw!"

"'Pshaw nothing," cried the drummer, bridling. "You cain't rub out Pete Rogers like that. Not Pete, you cain't. If you was a well-read guy, my friend, you'd know that Cap Rogers has traveled passenger afore now, just a meek passenger, until the shooting starts, when he ups and gets the con. or brakeman, providing they don't belong to his gang already."

"The conductor, the brakeman, have belonged to his gang, you say?"

The drummer made a gesture. Anything was possible with his train-robber demigod.

"Hold on," said Sanderson, impatiently rapping his forehead with his knuckles, "hold on, I want to think."

"——!" moaned the drummer, "if Pete *is* on here to-night——"

"Oh, shut up!" ordered Sanderson.

HE HAD need to put things together. If conductors and brakemen belonged to Rogers's gang—— In a second that inspiring hint was raging like flame through the riddle, lighting up everything in his seething brain.

"I have it," he cried, "I have it!"

"What, son," drawled the cattleman, "the fan-tods?"

Sanderson lowered his voice to an excited whisper.

"There's a brakeman back in this coach now, doing nothing but reading a newspaper, just sitting there."

"Maybe he's delicate," hazarded the cattleman.

"No, no, don't you understand, he's one of the gang!"

"Well, I'll be——" declared the drummer, though astonishment left him no word to specify.

"And the conductor," Sanderson hurried on, "he's out there on the front platform."

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"Bless us!" gasped the cattleman, rolling his eyes.

"He's one of them, too. One of the gang."

"'Course he is, seeing he's out there on the——"

"And he's with," Sanderson turned to the drummer, who was staring aghast, wonder big in his eyes, "and he's with—Pete Rogers!"

The drummer jumped, his right hand twisting behind him, an unwholesome gleam in his eye. But instantly he let forth a wheezy whistle, like a collapsing gas bag.

"Gawd," he breathed, "ain't that fierce!"

"A beetle-browed chap in a buttoned-up cutaway," Sanderson went on; "wears a black derby."

The cattleman drew from his pocket a plug of tobacco of the size of a split shingle and carefully bit off a corner. He nestled his head on the back of the settee and chewed comfortably.

"Wa'n't it you, son," he asked, "as was mentioning something about nonsense a while back?"

"They're bound to be train-robbers," Sanderson persisted. "There's no other way to explain their being so confounded interested in me. They think I'm an army officer, and they think I am here to give them trouble."

"All right, son, but I don't seem to notice them being so terrible interested."

Sanderson jumped to his feet.

"I'll show you," he retorted. "Stand out here in the corridor and watch."

He went back through the car, the Kansas girl following him with her eyes. He turned the knob of the door, to go out on the rear platform. The brakeman sprang before him.

"Nix, come back. It's not allowed."

The brakeman's voice was gruff, his look threatening; but undeniably his heart was in his mouth.

Sanderson did not persist. He turned and retraced his steps, passing the Kansas girl, the cattleman in the corridor and then the conductor and the bushy-browed man on the front platform. He went into the day-coach ahead and heard behind him footsteps. He kept on through the train to the front door of the coach behind the baggage-car. He was opening this door when a hand fell on his shoulder. The hand half swung him round and there was the conductor. Formidable though the conductor might be, there was a bit of heart in his mouth too.

"It's not allowed," he growled. "Come back in."

"Come, son," spoke another voice.

It was the cattleman, who had followed them both and, trailing the cattleman, was the bushy-browed man. Each had had the drop on the man in front; a strategy by tandem, so to speak. The cattleman took Sanderson by the elbow and they returned to their council-of-war in the Pullman smoker. The conductor and the bushy-browed man followed them as far as the platform.

"Well, my friend," said the fat drummer, who had not moved, "did Pete bite?"

THEY paid no attention to him. The cattleman motioned Sanderson to the wicker chair and himself sat opposite on the settee. He bit off a second corner of the plug, and, as he ruminated, he gazed steadily at young Sanderson.

"Now, son," he said at last, "let's figger on this thing a bit. For instance, what stampeded you on to the notion that the beetle-brow feller is Pete Rogers, and that the conductor's in with him?"

"Well, because they're so afraid of me. They think I am some terror to desperadoes and that I have been loaned by the Government to come down here and catch this Rogers at the very first new break he makes."

"No, son," objected the cattleman, "that won't wash. They wouldn't be scared of one man all alone."

"No, maybe not, but at Denison I telegraphed my father, and that bothered them a lot. Now why? Why should a telegram to one's father, saying that he had arrived safely in Denison, bother anybody? Why? Suppose you do some of this figuring."

The cattleman's weathered brow puckered into folds. He pondered. He began to muse aloud:

"Of course, now, any telegram, the minute it's a code-signal, ain't no longer an innocent telegram. 'Denison,' you said? Well, Denison might mean Waco, and you being a terror to desperadoes, you want the Rangers to meet you near Waco, where you'll round up Pete's gang while they're waiting to hold up this train. And your

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telegram will be repeated to Waco, or wherever this place Denison happens to be. H'm, yes, I see as how that would bother Pete Rogers a heap."

Abruptly the cattleman spat out his quid. He leaned forward and tapped Sanderson on the knee with his finger-nail.

"Son," he said, "write another of them innocent telegrams to Papa. There's the blanks, behind you. And when we're at supper in the depot at Dallas, you slip it to me; slip it to me real secret-like, understand?"

The drummer clapped the cattleman on the shoulder.

"Eh, eh," he yapped, "that *will* bother 'em for fair. Eh, eh, my, yes!"

When, after a forty-five-minute stop at Dallas, the train pulled out again into the stormy night, young Sanderson and the cattleman foregathered once more in the smoker. The latter's rather grim manner of the afternoon was now wholly grim.

"You saw that conductor snooping around when I tried to send your telegram?" he began. "And the beetle-brow feller with him? Well, they got that telegram away from the operator. How, I don't know, but they did, and we're sure riding with trouble, son, and you ought to 've stopped off in Dallas 'long with that novelty jack-rabbit of a jewelry-drummer. Anyhow, bunk in early, son, and pull up the covers. Pull 'em clean up to the eyebrows."

Sent to bed! Mr. F. Crittenden Sanderson was hurt and indignant. It recalled the sting dealt him by the Kansas girl. "Don't mix in," she had said. Terror to outlaws though she thought him, yet she had forbidden him, like a severe parent, as to mixing in. Well, he *would* mix in. He'd show her. And it would serve her right if he had to protect her from Pete Rogers himself. He hotly craved the chance. He hated Pete Rogers. He wanted only a chance at Pete Rogers.

V

HE WENT to his berth, already made up, and took from his suit-case his revolver; that is to say, a neat, hammerless, gentlemanly little ornament of blue steel; caliber about a five-grain capsule. He returned to the smoker in time to surprise the cattleman pushing a huge black forty-four between his trousers and shirt. The butt protruded, but over it the cattleman pulled his vest.

"There has been times here in Texas," he said softly, as if he were caught in sentiment's mellowing thrall and might as well own up, "long ago, understand, when I've shot at targets, and maybe buzzards on occasion. 'Pears like I squandered my breath, son, about recommending bed."

Bed was a recommendation not likely to be heeded that night, unless by little children whose mothers tucked them away fully dressed, then huddled near by and watched and started in panic each time the door slammed open or the brakes screeched or the engine whistled. The dread of Pete Rogers was on them all. Mere burglars would have seemed homelike. In the day-coaches, men and women pressed noses against rain-smeared windows, seeing the inchoate silhouette of cedar-covered hills when the lightning flashed and, near-by, a ravine or grove darkly indicated for an outlaw's ambush.

In the smoker of the Pullman the cattleman dozed and young Sanderson counted the miles by the rhythmic pounding of the wheels, or lost count because of the pounding of his heart. Responsibility grew and grew on him. He thought of the Kansas girl in there, who must be protected, or be humiliated by being protected. He could not know that she had repaired to the drawing-room and, since one must sit up for train-robbers, was reading her magazine on Homelike Home-Decorating. Young Sanderson did not read. He could not. His only companion, except his pipe, was the little thirty-two in his coat pocket, gripped in a sweaty palm. Any instant now there might be gun-shots, a frantic throwing on of brakes, yells, screams, curses—and then the battle with desperadoes.

Instead, there came the nattily uniformed Pullman conductor. Sanderson looked up with a start. Even an embroidery clerk would have startled him just then.

"Well?" said Sanderson.

The uniformed knees of the *chargé du Pullman* were clinging one to the other and he swayed vaguely between the curtains in the doorway. He summoned a weakly propitiatory smile.

"The porter, sir, the porter—he wants to go to bed."

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"My goodness," exclaimed Sanderson, "then why doesn't he?"

The Pullman conductor nodded apologetically at the settee, where the cattleman sat, head thrown back, mouth open, gurgling in slumber.

"Because, sir, you know, he makes up his berth in here, you know."

"I see. You mean that you want us to go to bed?"

The Pullman conductor nodded eagerly.

It was a reasonable request. At least it seemed reasonable until Sanderson began to perceive, in the darkened corridor behind the Pullman conductor, the towering broad shoulders of the train-conductor. Train-conductors are not usually solicitous about a negro porter's rest.

"All right," said Sanderson, wishing to test the thing, "soon as I finish this pipe."

The Pullman conductor hesitated, whereat the train-conductor brushed contemptuously past him into the compartment.

"Here, you," he ordered, "it's 'most midnight. You two git to your berths."

Sanderson's heart struck up a rat-a-tat. He knew now. The conductor meant to separate them before the hold-up, and the robbers would have them at their mercy.

"Now, git," said the conductor. "I'll roust out your pardner myself."

HE ADVANCED a step toward the cattleman; but then, above the rumble of the train and the downpour on the roof, there came to their ears what rang like the sharp crack of a whip and then another and another, and a fusillade of sawed-off shotguns.

With the brakes grinding and the air screeching, the storm out in the black night might have been conjured into a million spitting, snarling wildcats.

The train-conductor straightened, rigid, listening. The Pullman conductor's globular eyes searched out corners, then, with a yelp like a scared puppy, he ducked and rolled under the settee. Also a streak of white jacket flashed past in the corridor and a moment later the rear door was jerked open. George the porter was heading north.

The train stopped with a shivering jolt. The jolt catapulted Sanderson out of his wicker chair. He threw out his arms. By a narrow margin he planted a palm in the upholstery on either side of the cattleman's face. The cattleman's snore was throttling him, making fearful noises. The spasm passed in a convulsive snort, and all was quiet. Surely the cattleman was extinct. Whereupon he opened his eyes and gazed vacuously at Sanderson in his lap.

"Lookee here, son," he complained, "why don't you stop when the train stops?"

The firing outside had ceased. The rain pattered steadily on the metal roof. There were distant yells ahead, at the engine, or around the baggage-car—commands, questions, menacing answers. The train throbbed all down its length in tumult. In the Pullman, the child was crying. Its mother and the other women had screamed, and were trembling, ready to scream again. And they did, piercingly, as the front door slammed open, letting in the panic from the crowded day-coaches.

Between the screams, there at the door, rose a voice, the sharp, rasping voice of the bushy-browed man. "I'll go through this car myself," it said.

"Pete Rogers!" thought Sanderson. So they were coming.

It had all happened while he was untangling himself from the cattleman.

"Hands up!" Turning, he rapped his skull against the barrel of a six-shooter. The conductor stood over him, holding it.

"Now that's an awful curious way to treat passengers," yawned the cattleman.

"Hands up, Cap!" the conductor repeated.

Sanderson could see the smut in the powder-burnt muzzle. He was white and his lip quivered. Yet he could not bring himself to obey. It was to renege on too much of a long nurtured self-esteem. It was not his cue in his dramatization of Mr. F. Crittenden Sanderson. He could not. The mechanism of lifting his hands was not in him.

"Why, curse your soul," roared the conductor, "hands up, I tell you!"

"Thanks, that's all I wanted to know." He who said this was the cattleman, from the settee. Also he said, "Now then, hands up your own self. Toler'ble quick, too. Hear me!"

The savage gleam behind the muzzle wavered.

"I'm choosing the next-to-the-bottom button of your vest," drawled the cattleman.

In other words, the stomach. That was

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too much. The conductor's eyes, so to speak, broke and ran for it. They ran in a line for the settee, and, as it were, into the cavern of the cattleman's forty-four.

"Quick, son," instantly bellowed the cattleman, "duck and hold the doorway! Now, now!"

Sanderson caught the idea like a hot grounder. He ducked even as the conductor fired, and came up behind the conductor, aiming his little .32 hammerless at the doorway and there, between the curtains, appeared a living target, the bushy-browed man.

The bushy-browed man's expression, as he noted Sanderson's ornamental firearm, was not at first of anxiety. It was rather perplexity. He blinked at the weapon, at Sanderson, at the weapon again. Something here was not according to specifications.

"That artillery," he cackled, "that squirt-gun, that watch-charm, that Christmas-tree fruit—oh, do tell!"

And Sanderson muddled him yet more.

"I've got to shoot you," the embryo young hero was stammering. "I've *got* to." But, like holding up his hands, he could not do it. Also he failed to see two six-shooters leveled from the bushy-browed man's hips. The bushy-browed man had even forgotten them himself.

"Say," he pleaded, "are you a sure bad man? Are you or aren't you, Cap——"

"Shoot him, son," ordered the cattleman. "Shoot him."

"I—I can't."

THEN appeared an added reason why he could not. The added reason was the Kansas girl. She had come running from the drawing-room at the other end of the car. She was in a dressing-sack, a becoming thing for soft, plump necks and soft, plump arms. A few hairpins had loosened, so that the rich abundance of coiled tresses seemed about to cascade over her shoulders. Anger danced in her eyes, yet they were still dreamily heavy from a recent nap, and in her hand she held her magazine, with a finger inserted in the article on home-decorating. Why she was an added reason was because she had stopped in the corridor behind the bushy-browed man. To think of a bullet's course after it should pass through the bushy-browed man was, in brief—well, to think of it was unthinkable!

Sanderson shuddered and lowered his pistol.

So lightly had she raced through the car that the bushy-browed man had not heard her, but he knew at once that some one was behind him. And some one behind him saying nothing, only panting and looking over his shoulder, could very easily be a deadly enemy—and must be one, since the enemy in front had lowered his weapon.

The bushy-browed man lived through seconds of clammy expectancy. A bullet he expected in the small of his back. But this bushy-browed man was a virtuoso in tragedy, and he counted on self-restraint as his only chance. He did not turn his head. He did not move. He knew that no human being can shoot a motionless fellow-man in the back without hesitating first. His calculation was diabolically well founded. The chubby little Kansas girl, with her magazine on home-decorating, did *not* shoot him in the back.

The bushy-browed man let his heart tick off for him the seconds until the foe behind should be most reluctant to shoot, and therefore most vulnerable, and, at that second precisely, he dropped, whirled, rose and caught the foe around the waist, pinioning the foe's arms, meaning to swing the foe between himself and his other foes. It was superb, superb and competent.

But what of the fragrance of a young woman's hair? What of a chiffon-clad waist under his rough touch? He knew there was a mistake, even in the consummation of his lightning-like violence, but knew it too late—too late! for young Sanderson was seeing reds and purples at witnessing Pete Rogers laying hands on the Kansas girl, and he leaped like a crazy Comanche, swinging the butt of his pistol, and the bushy-browed man wilted to the floor under his feet.

The scrambling of a Cyclopean conflict rose behind him. He turned. His veins were a tangle of barbed wire, and each barb was stinging. Young Sanderson had never been so mad and so happy. He saw the compartment filled with a species of infuriated octopus, eight writhing legs and arms, the whole mass heaving, gyrating, uttering growls of rage. Obviously the train-conductor had budged. And the cattleman had jumped him. Abruptly the

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mass sank. The cattleman's long shanks hinged themselves on the conductor's chest. The Pullman conductor's globular orbs glistened on them from under the settee. Sanderson jerked down towels and threw them to the cattleman.

"Good old boy," he yelled, "good old boy! Now truss him up, and we'll lick the rest of 'em!"

He himself would not wait. The gang outside might be boarding the train, and he wanted in on the fight. He gripped his .32, meaning to dash out. But the Kansas girl stood in his way. She stood over the senseless form of the bushy-browed man. She held one of his revolvers, clenched in both hands. Her eyes alone were poniards.

"You think," she challenged him, in the uttermost accent of scorn, "you think you're splendid, don't you?"

He fell back. His head began to swim.

"But if—if you——" She tried to steady the revolver, and aimed it, approximately, at him, "think you can—can——"

"Jumping Jerusalem," ejaculated the cattleman, "she's one of the gang, too!"

"—can hold up one of Dad's trains," sobbed the girl, "you're mighty much mistaken. Ho-hold up your hands!"

"Blow his brains out, Miss Molly," pleaded the conductor. "Blow his brains out!"

Instead the black six-shooter trembled like a leaf. The girl looked sick.

Now young Sanderson had an idea. A young idea. He *had* to get by. He could see but that one thing for a man to do.

"You don't understand," he begged. "You must let me pass. You must. Please."

Her look was imploring. It implored him not to make her pull that dreadful trigger.

"If you try it," she whispered faintly, "I will—don't you see? I will *have* to shoot."

Screams came to them from the coaches ahead and men's rough voices ordering silence. The deputies overcome, the robbers were going through the train! It intensified Sanderson's young idea. He advanced a step. Another. Another. He did not falter. Her hands tightened on the ugly revolver and she shut her eyes. For an instant she swayed. And then she dropped the pistol and put her arm across her eyes and sobbed.

Sanderson knew a pang of remorse as he darted past her into the corridor, the screams of women drawing him on. And just there he hurtled into a rain-coated figure dripping water.

VI

"H'M," said the man, gazing into the smoking-compartment, "I knew the whole train had gone daft, but this is sure the violent ward."

At the first sound of his voice, which played the gamut of quiet sarcasm, the Kansas girl looked up quickly, her lashes batting the tears away.

"Dad!" she cried, "Dad!" and she hugged the rain-coated man tight around the neck.

The train-conductor got his head off the floor high enough for a glimpse.

"Lord," he groaned, "it's the G. M!" He reared under his captor like a swelling arch. "Here, lemme up, lemme up! It's the G. M."

"G. M., eh?" said the cattleman, negligently laying a palm on the conductor's brow and thwacking his head to the floor. "Grand Master, eh? Well, cover the G. M., son. Just keep him covered. We'll bust up the whole durn' lodge."

Sanderson hesitated. The rain-coated man did not look like a train-robber. Except for his dripping coat, he looked more as though he had stepped out of a big office-building than off a lonely prairie on a black, stormy night. He gripped a fragrant cigar between his teeth and his clothes went with the cigar. He might have occupied an entire floor of the said office-building. Moreover, in a workaday fashion, he at once took charge of the situation, and this went with the rest of him.

"I see," said he, twisting his cigar in his wry way, "first a carful of crazy deputies blaze into the landscape, thinking I am a train-robber. Then, when they come with me through the train to quiet the passengers, the passengers think *they* are train-robbers. And here—h'm, here the train-robber bug seems to be a full-grown zoölogical garden on a corn-whisky jag. Molly, girl, what the——"

This was proper tribute. He accepted her as the least incoherent of those present.

"But, Dad——" She had her own questions first. "That shooting? You know, the shooting that stopped the train?"

"Shooting nothing, Molly. I stopped

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the train. That is, my brakeman slipped and smashed his lantern, and we had to use torpedoes."

"Then it wasn't—wasn't the Rogers gang?"

"Why, no."

"But," said the girl, "this is—is Pete Rogers, here."

"Where?"

There was a puzzling undertone in the G. M.'s astonishment.

"There!" cried the girl. But she did not point at the bushy-browed man coming to on the floor. Her intense forefinger went straight at young Sanderson.

"Me?" gasped Sanderson.

"Yes, him, sir," roared the conductor from under the cattleman.

"Him, to rights," feebly echoed the bushy-browed man, sitting up and rubbing his head.

"H'm, I should say so," agreed the G. M., "seeing the way he got all of you to rights. Really, Mr. Rogers—beg pardon, Captain Rogers—permit me, as it were, to pin a rose on you. What am I talking about? A whole conservatory, sir."

"Look here," protested Sanderson, "my name's Sanderson. Frank Sanderson, of Kansas City." He did not speak by the card, you observe. Unadorned Frank Sanderson had come out on top of a late and unlamented F. Crittenden.

"Tut, tut," said the G. M., "you mustn't contradict older heads, young man. Sam, suppose you explain to him why he's Pete Rogers."

"I will that, quick enough," said the conductor. "Lemme up!"

"Yes," said the G. M., "why not let him up?"

"Not on your life," drawled the cattleman. "He's one of the gang. And if you're looking for Pete, that's him over in the corner, the beetle-brow feller. And one other thing, Grand Master, who the thunder may you be?"

"I?" said Molly's father. "Oh, I'm just the General Manager of the Katy railroad system, and if you want credentials, that's my car out there now, sidetracked, waiting for a wandering bunch of deputy marshals."

"Look and see, son."

Sanderson raised the window. He saw a private car and engine on a cattle-siding.

"It's all right," he reported.

"Then," said the cattleman, "maybe His Initials will help us take Pete Rogers, over there, in charge."

"That's not Pete," said the G. M. "Look—though I don't blame him for hiding it."

Saying which, he unbuttoned the bushy-browed man's coat and there, on the vest, flashed the star of a United States marshal.

The cattleman glanced reproachfully at Sanderson.

"I'm blest," he stated.

"I thought," said the G. M., "that we were all agreed that our young friend here was Captain Rogers, and Sam was about to —— Oh, by the way, won't you let Sam up?"

"Sure," said the cattleman, "I'd plumb forgot."

THE glaring conductor rose to his feet. He dug into his pocket and vengefully flaunted two telegrams. "Now here," he cried, "here's the proof. He sent 'em, Pete Rogers there sent 'em to his gang, when he got wind of the marshal and deputies being on board."

"Of all the——" began Sanderson. "Oh, rats!" He cut himself short.

"And you see yourself, sir," spoke the marshal, "that we haven't been held up. No wonder. They got his message."

The G. M. nodded thoughtfully. "Good eye, good head, good sleuth work, Mr. Marshal," he agreed. "And here all of you have been fighting, and everybody thinking everybody else was Pete Rogers, and my own child, who's kind to her mother, as bad as any. And meantime—meantime," the G. M. repeated affably, "Pete's gang has been holding up the northbound. Yes, gentlemen all, the northbound, this side of Dallas."

"Eh, what, the northbound?"

"Even the northbound, Mr. Marshal. Dallas wired me an hour ago, at Waco, whereupon I ordered out an engine and am here to take you and your deputies back to the scene of the outrage. We may even bravely round up a few foot-tracks. The ground is soft, and they had heavy loads."

"Heavy loads?"

"Why, yes," said the G. M. pleasantly, "didn't I mention that the pay-car was attached? No? Oh, well, we won't mention it, seeing that you have captured the ferocious Pete Rogers himself."

"That's all right," the conductor snarled under the lash, "we have got him, got him

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good." He gripped Sanderson's arm to demonstrate. "And I'm thinking he'll lead the marshal to where they've hidden the swag, too."

Sanderson jerked his arm free. At least, he was as tall as the conductor, and he doubled his fist.

"I'm tired of this," he announced, "and I'm just about ready to hand anybody a swift——"

"Sam," interposed the G. M. wearily, "he isn't convinced yet. Say something to him, Sam. He has a right to know who he is."

"Let him take a look at his ticket, then," growled the conductor, "his railroad ticket."

The young man's sudden flush might have been guilt.

"I don't understand," he faltered, "I——"

"Look at it, that's all."

"Then look," Sanderson retorted. "It's a scalper's ticket. I bought it on Union Avenue, in Kansas City. It's an army officer's ticket. See for yourself, the Government stamp is on the back."

The marshal glanced at the ticket.

"No, that isn't an army officer's," he said.

"And he knows it ain't," cried the conductor, "and he didn't git it in Kansas City, neither. Maybe he got somebody else's valise and papers there, but not that ticket. Naw, Pete, you ain't as slick as lots of folks think."

"But — but," Sanderson exclaimed, "whose ticket is it then?"

"Whose? Oh, my foot! Why, your'n, Pete! It's the one the Government give you when they let you loose out o' the Leavenworth pen, yesterday. You got it for wherever you wanted to go, like they give any convict; and the marshal knowed, for the warden telegraphed that your ticket read San Antone, same as if it read mischief, only now we got you and got you good."

"You mean to say——" gasped Sanderson.

The cattleman interposed. "I wouldn't of thought it of you, son, setting me on to fight marshals and conductors thataway. The conductor didn't 'pear to like it, neither."

"—to say, then," persisted Sanderson, "that I've been riding on a convict's ticket?"

He looked toward Molly's father, and that gentleman gravely nodded his head. And Molly's eyes were on him, laughing, yet laughing in warmth and sympathy.

But he looked hastily away. Through Kansas, the Indian Territory and into Texas, he had been but a discharged convict. In her eyes he had been but a convict. And he recalled how he, who looked wise and knew the ropes, had inflated his chest, had achieved a military stride. A vast deal that was in young Mr. Sanderson flattened very flat during this eternal minute of agonized abasement.

"Why, confound his bull head," exclaimed the G. M., "he doesn't believe yet that he's Pete! Here, Sam, there's only one thing more to do. We'll have to show him his picture. Luckily, I had the warden mug him for me last week, and here it is."

From his pocketbook he drew a small photograph and handed it to the conductor.

"Well, Sam," he inquired after a moment, "what's the trouble? Captain Rogers is waiting to see his portrait."

THE conductor's bulging eyes were glued to the photograph. The marshal looked over his shoulder and the marshal's eyes likewise fastened on it. Likewise with the cattleman. Likewise with Sanderson. They were equally transfixed by a fat head, flabby jowls and pasty skin, under a convict's striped cap. The G. M. waited, smiling a twisted smile through the blue smoke of his Havana.

The cattleman came to the surface first.

"If it ain't," he murmured reverently, "why, bless my soul and body, if it ain't that novelty-jewelry-drummer!"

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The River Guard

by G. W. Ogden

IN JUNE the Rio Grande runs broad and deep with red water which sucks around its boulders and beats into dark foam against its cliffs. It is then that the swollen river carries its sanguinary streak far out into the green waters of the Gulf. It looks like blood, it runs like blood, thickly, without a joyous ripple or a musical murmur. It seems then as if the mountains from whose sides it gushes had closed in a deadly battle, and that this is the outpouring of their dark, sodden hearts.

When the river is high, the mounted revenue officers, known unofficially as river guards, sometimes sleep an entire night through without a reproach of conscience. For then it is a strong horse and a bold rider indeed that will dare the sullen current and its treacherous, hidden strength. Smuggling of cattle and sheep across the border by Mexican outlaws—sometimes in the employ of honorable American citizens—comes to a standstill then, and the passage of other goods and merchandise is made impossible without steamboats or pontoons. And of course the business has not grown into such important strength as that.

Bill Rodgers, once Texas Ranger, now river guard along more than a hundred miles of frontier, was hauling water to camp that afternoon. Bill's nearest spring was more than a mile away, and his way of transporting a week's supply at one time was with a keg and a lizard, hauled by a rope hitched to his saddle-horn. A lizard is a stone-boat in some parts of the country, but it is the same thing everywhere, no matter what its name, and its shape is the shape of half the ace of diamonds. A lizard is cut from the crotch of a tree, the pointed end being beveled to keep it from rooting its nose into the ground.

It wasn't much in the way of water, after all Bill's trouble to get it, but it beat the mineral composition slugging its way toward the Gulf in front of his tent. A man might eat a cupful of Rio Grande water with a spoon, like gruel, if he had to do it, and live, but he never would attempt it unless he had to do it to live. Bill said he knew a man once who crossed the river at flood on snow-shoes.

So Bill was hauling up water. He had a barrel sunk into the sand inside his tent, and into that he poured what he pulled up in the keg. This portable cistern kept his drinking-supply fairly cool. The river being on duty, Bill was enjoying a sort of half-relaxed vacation, taking advantage of the stream's formidable condition to fill his barrel cistern. That required several trips to the spring, and the day was as hot as a day before a tornado. Bill, out of long trustfulness in the river at flood-stage, felt secure, so secure that he left his automatic rifle in the tent the first trip, and hung his revolver and cartridge-belt beside it on the second, to be free of the chafing weight, in the sweat and heat, about his waist.

Along the river, a fringe on both its banks, grew thick willows, and on the Mexican side the desert shrub called *torneo*—because it is barbed at every point like a knight in a tourney—stretched back over the plain to the table-land near the hills, as green and fresh to behold from a distance as a great field of Kansas corn. On Bill's side of the river there was no *torneo*, but here and there along the route to his spring was a

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clump-topped, gnarled-boled *roble,* or live-oak, which made it very pleasant to draw up under and blow the horse.

BILL was thinking how nice it would be if a man could go through life without a gun pulling down on him all the time. Hot as it was, he felt as though he could make a pretty good showing in a foot-race, he felt so light, as he swung off his horse before the tent on his last trip. The sun was low. It hit him under the hat brim, flashing in his eyes. Bill rolled the keg off the lizard and began guiding it toward the tent-flap. A long shadow of a man, another, another, popped up from the river-bank. Bill clapped his hand to the place where his revolver should have been, but wasn't.

There were at least six yards between him and the tent, and across that space the shadows moved as the men sprang toward him. They were Mexican shadows, that was mighty plain to Bill, and Mexicans were making them, which was plainer to Bill, as he focused his eyes to meet the slant sunlight and looked at them. There they were, grinning, not ten feet away, their guns down on him to a man.

"Meesta Beel, we come for you!" said one.

Bill knew him at once for a man who called himself Vincente Flores. He had stolen four horses from a rancher at San Bonito after working a week on the irrigation ditches. He was a distant son of some Mexican governor, or general, or some highly-consequential dignitary across the river, and he prided himself on his English, although he knew that Rodgers could speak Spanish as well as if he had been born to it.

Bill saw that they were wet to the armpits, and under the low bank there dripped the horses that they had ridden across. Bill, seeing this, realized that he was facing extraordinary men. They had braved a great peril to get over to him; they were not the men to turn tail at the bluff of an unarmed man. There were scores to settle between him and more than one Mexican smuggler. Bill ran over them with a flashing review, as a man flicks a pack of cards.

There was but a space of three breaths between that instant and the moment he stooped to roll the keg. But a man can think a long distance in a short time when he is six yards from his guns and the need of them is imminent and pressing.

There wasn't a bit of use in flaring up and making a bluff, Bill knew that. They had him; they knew he didn't have a gun where he could get at it. That accounted for the pleased, easy expressions of their faces. Bill saw that, whatever the motive back of the visit was, those black chaps were there for business. Bill had long since given over the notion, which so many United States Americans have, that all a man has to do to stampede the Mexican nation is to whoop and sail in with both fists. He had been mixed up with too many of them to carry that idea any farther.

Bill straightened his back, looking at them with a good deal more friendly expression than he felt.

"All right, boys," said he, "take your guns off of me. I ain't got mine. What do you fellers want?"

They moved around Bill, cutting off his last slim chance of making a dash for the tent.

"You 'fraid of sweem?" asked Flores.

"No, I reckon not," said Bill.

Bill had some hope that he might maneuver and turn back when they started across, but once in the river he gave that up. It seemed to him that the river never had been so strong and deep. Bill's horse was a light animal, and the weight of his body sank it until it had hard work to keep its nostrils above the stream. The Mexicans had compelled him to plunge in ahead of them and there was no turning back, but Bill knew that he never would make it if he stuck to the saddle. He shouted to Flores, who was near him, up-stream:

"I've got to slip off and git him by the tail or he'll drown."

"All right," agreed Flores, shifting his reins to his left hand, drawing his revolver and making ready to act in case the captive, whom he knew to be a wily man, tried to work any of his *Yanqui* tricks on him.

BUT Bill had no time, and no chance against the thick water, which bore him along swiftly, to think of getting away or to act on any wild scheme he may have momentarily harbored. It was a fight for life, every man for himself, before they had gone ten yards from shore. The Mexicans were much better mounted than Bill, but when they straggled out on the southern shore two of them were missing. Neither horses nor men were to be seen anywhere above the red waters.

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Flores sent the two who had come safely through with him down the river to see whether the others had landed below. They came back after a while, throwing out their empty hands expressively.

"Oh, well," commented Flores, "plenty left. Come on."

Back on the plateau between the brush fringe and the hills they came up with five more mounted men. Bill began to understand what he might expect when he recognized Antonio Rojas sitting his horse sullenly apart from the more common thieves and murderers of his notorious band.

For twenty years, even before Bill Rodgers left the Rangers to become a river guard, Rojas had been raiding the ranchers on both sides of the river. He robbed his compatriots as often as the Americans, and killed them if they resisted or appealed to the law. Bill had been in more than one encounter with Rojas and his band. Five years before he had captured a brother of the robber chief, and that gentleman was then serving a long sentence in a Federal prison far from the border. So there was an account between the river guard and the Mexican, with the unsatisfied side of it rusting and rankling in the sly old outlaw's heart.

Rojas rode up as Bill and his captors approached. Bill's hands were tied behind him, and his feet were lashed together under his horse's belly. Flores waved his hat triumphantly as they galloped up on their spent horses. Rojas reined up his barbarously decorated horse beside Bill's sorry mount.

"Well, Meesta Beel," he sneered, "you have—a-come to veeseet me?"

Bill said nothing, but he looked the contempt he felt for the little, undersized, trinket-laden, ringed, unwashed old reprobate, who grinned at him with big yellow teeth which seemed sharpened and set to tear him like the teeth of a saw. There were Mexican thieves whom Bill respected, men who stole from the American side only, respecting their own countrymen and their possessions faithfully. But this Rojas was a plain murderer and sneak. Revolutions might come and go in Mexico, but they were all one to Rojas. He robbed both sides alike, sympathizing with none, fighting for none, contributing to none. He was an outcast, too vicious and too mean to have even the redeeming quality of stealing to further a cause that might have some remote glimmer of justice in it, as some of his border countrymen did.

"Oh, you no speak to me, Meesta Beel?" said Rojas, riding nearer, kicking Bill's horse viciously. The tired animal did not jump as he expected it to do, merely humping a little, moving away. Rojas dropped the despised American speech. "Well, then," said he in his native tongue, "if you refuse to speak to me and discuss this matter like a gentleman, it can wait. Where are the others?" he asked, turning to Flores.

"Lost in the river coming over with this *Yanqui*," said Flores, kicking Bill's horse on the other side.

"We charge them up to you, señor," said Rojas; "they go into the account with my brother." He leaned over, glowering a moment into Bill's face. Bill did not flinch, but gravely returned the outlaw's gaze. "You shall hang," said Rojas, "do you understand that? You shall hang, American hog!"

Bill made no reply. He was looking across the river toward his camp, which could be seen quite plainly from that point. Rojas wore field-glasses slung around his shoulders, and Bill was putting two and two together. From there Rojas had seen him drawing up water without his guns. That accounted for the bold raid and capture. Bill had been wondering all along how it came that the Mexicans had grown brave enough to take a chance they never had taken before, that of running deliberately into the open face to face with a river guard.

"Serves me right," he muttered, "serves any man right that's fool enough to ever put down his gun when he's on a job like this."

No man can contemplate being hung up by the neck with his emotions unmoved. Bill was not a speculative or imaginative man, but one swift picture flashed before him which sent a shudder through his hair. They rode off to the south, into the hills, where Rodgers knew Rojas had his permanent camp. Rojas had been established there a long time. Everybody knew, in a general way, where the camp was, but none of the *rurales*, or Mexican mounted police, ever seemed to stumble upon it. They made a great show of chasing Rojas at times, but the chase always fell off before they reached his fortified stronghold in the hills. It was said that he bought immunity

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by dividing his stolen goods, or the proceeds of them, with the officials in command. Which doubtless was true, as that always has been the rule in Mexico, as everybody knows.

IT WAS more than a night's ride from the river. They rode until long after dark, then made camp, Rodgers bound hand and foot and thrown upon the ground between Rojas and his lieutenant, Flores. They had not thought it worth while to waste food on a man condemned to die.

All night Rodgers turned in his mind some plan of escape, coming up to a standstill every time when it came to the fetters about his hands and feet. They were skilfully put on, no straining would loosen them. It seemed to be a case for making up the book and getting ready to quit. They were in saddle again at sunrise, Flores and Rojas discussing Rodgers's fate, quite frankly and openly, as they rode one on each side of him,

"We propose to hang you, Señor Beel," said Rojas, grinning hungrily, his piggish eyes bright with savage anticipation, "where you will swing as an example and warning to others of what they may expect. We have in our camp a fine young lady, no less than the daughter of Ramon Parral; you know him, with his fortune of gold and his million cattle. We hold her for fifty thousand pesos. I tell you this for you are about to die, and it may be of comfort to you to know that you shall die for a good purpose. Parral is hunting for us with many men. Perhaps he will find us, perhaps not. He will pay in the end. No matter.

"But these foolish men whom he has sent out to find his daughter may make mistakes. They may make such a mistake as to come too near the place where Antonio Rojas has his retreat. In that case they will find the body of Señor Beel, the brave *Yanqui*, hanging to the limb of a live-oak, with this warning written on his back: 'This is the fate of all who come too near Antonio Rojas. Beware!' "

Rojas and Flores had their laugh over it. As for Rodgers, he was hungry and he was tired, and the ropes around his wrists and ankles were drawn cruelly, cutting into the swollen flesh.

"Ride on," said he, "ride on, you little old goat, and git it over with as soon as you can."

"There will be no hurry, Señor Beel," said Rojas. "We shall take our time."

THEY reached camp toward evening. Rodgers noted its position of natural defense. For a long way as they approached they rode single file on the lip of a dry canyon, a drop of two hundred feet or more below them to the bottom of its jagged bed. Rojas's fort was a log enclosure set back into a little pocket between the hill at its back and the canyon in front. The narrow road was its only approach.

"Feed him, unbind him, let him sleep," ordered Rojas. "A man hangs better when he is fresh."

In spite of the unpleasant prospect ahead of him, Rodgers could not keep awake. It was dawn when he came back to the sickening recollection of his situation with a sudden wrench of the nerves which brought him to his feet. Palely the light was falling through the barred door of the room into which they had thrust him the evening before. On the other side of the partition wall he could hear some one moaning a prayer. Rodgers listened. It was a woman's voice. It must be Francesca Parral, thought he. He moved closer, pressing his ear to the wall. She was praying, and praying not for herself, but for him.

Rodgers would have knocked on the wall, meaning to speak to her, to thank her, to offer her comfort, but the voice of Rojas sounded in her room.

"Well, Francesca, my beautiful queen," said he, "the hour has come for the brave *Yanqui* to die. It will be a fine thing to see; will you go?"

She upbraided him in horror, then fell to weeping and begging Rojas to have mercy.

"My father will reward you," she cried. "He is my father's friend. Señor Rodgers is a brave man, he never shoots a man from behind."

"Nor I, señorita," said Rojas, "if you mean to imply that I do."

"You," she scorned, "you assassin, you thief, you murderer! Oh, if I had ten *rurales* at my command I'd sweep you and your filthy followers into the canyon!"

"For this compliment, señorita, you shall be one of our party, you shall go with us and see this famous Texas Ranger hang by the neck and thrust out his big, black tongue like a steer that dies of thirst. That will be a fine sight for your beautiful eyes, fine."

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"No," she declared, "I'll not go, and you surely are not base enough, base as you are, to compel me!"

"Just so," said Rojas, "just so, if you do not walk of your own will, then I shall make them drag you! You shall stand near, very near, to him when he dies, choking, strangling, making horrible noises in his throat! Do you understand, my fine lady? You shall stand so near that you can feel his last breath on your hand!"

Rojas slammed her door behind him. Rodgers heard the rattle of the chain and the click of the padlock on the outside. Then came Rojas, with two villains at his back, to fetch Rodgers away. They taunted him, they led him unbound, hands free, flaunting liberty before him, yet withdrawing it hopelessly out of his reach. They made Rodgers mount his own horse. Around the corner, in front of the stockade, they kept him waiting. Presently the others who were to make up the party came out, Francesca Parral bound into a saddle in their midst.

RODGERS computed that they went about three miles from the camp. The chosen spot for his disgraceful execution was at a point where a great oak thrust its branches out over the gaping canyon. Its roots had broken blocks of stone out of the cliff face. They twisted there, black, knotted, like an old man's fingers, clinging on to the edge of that ugly gash. There everybody dismounted, one man in four being told off to hold the horses. Rodgers was unbound, but Francesca Parral's hands were tied behind her back.

"You give me your word, señorita, that you will not cover your eyes, and I will make your hands free," said Rojas, as he helped her from her horse.

"I can close my eyes, even if my hands are tied," said she.

Rojas cursed furiously.

"And I," said he, jerking her rudely by the shoulder, "can cut your eyelids away, and then what is to hide the kicking *Yanqui* from your sight?"

"Be a gentleman, once in your miserable life, Rojas," suggested Rodgers, "and send Francesca back. What do you want to make her look at this disgraceful business for any way?"

"Keep still, hog!" commanded Rojas. "And cut them away I shall," said he, turning again to Francesca, "the moment I see you close one of them longer than a wink! Remember, with my own hands I'll do it!"

"I never have seen you, Señor Rodgers, before," said she, "but I have heard father speak of you many times, and of the assistance you have given him in protecting his herds from thieves. I have pleaded with this wretched man for your life; I would give my own to save it."

"Thank you, little girl," said Rodgers, laying his hand upon her head. "I heard you pleadin' with Somebody higher up than this feller this mornin', and if He don't see any use in liftin' a hand to save me, I reckon it must be because I ain't worth savin'. Don't you worry about me. If they drop me low, you can't see much, and I'd ruther you looked, all the way through, than lose them purty eyes."

She was crying. Tearfully she turned again to Rojas, tearfully she went down upon her knees there on the ledge and begged him for mercy. He turned from her, ordering the rope made ready. The plan was, as Rodgers had already seen, to pass a long rope over the projecting limb of the oak and then push him from the cliff.

"Make it long," said he, "give me plenty of rope. And here, tie my hands and feet."

Rojas grinned.

"No, I shall be a gentleman, once in my life," said he. "I shall permit you to die with your hands and feet free. Perhaps that is more comfortable, who knows?"

FRANCESCA sprang to her feet, her lips apart, a flush in her cheeks, her big eyes, still gushing tears, asparkle with a new light. Rodgers followed her gaze. There, not a hundred yards below, coming up the steep trail, were the hats of the *rurales!* In a moment the sun was on the barrels of their rifles, twinkling from the trappings of their saddles, catching the bright trinkets that adorned their barbarous dress. The surprise was mutual. Rojas had set a guard ten yards or so down the trail. There were four men in the detail. They fired, and came pattering back to the main body under the live oak tree.

Francesca gave a cry of delight as the *rurales*, shouting, galloped toward them.

"Kill them, kill the prisoners!" yelled Rojas, snatching his pistol. But Rodgers was

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a second quicker. He had Rojas by the belt, flung himself flat on his stomach and dangled the little captain of robbers over the cliff.

"If you touch her I'll drop him!" yelled Rodgers.

The men were firing at the advancing *rurales*. They hesitated, for two or three of them were down, and those who followed, owing to the narrow trail, could not make out anything ahead. They wavered, falling back.

Rojas, squirming and cursing, tried to raise his pistol and shoot Rodgers, but a sharp jolt against a projecting rock knocked it out of his hand. More than a hundred feet below it struck and went off. The horses they had ridden down had broken away and were thundering back along the perilous road. Rodgers felt several rifle-muzzles against his back, and heard them commanding him, under threat of instant death, to put Rojas back on the cliff.

"Shoot whenever you want to," said Rodgers, "and when I go he goes with me. Take your hands off of me, take 'em off, I say, or down he goes! Now you cut that rope off of that girl's arms! Look a-here, Rojas," he gave the little old captain a jerk and a slam against the rocks to sharpen his perception and appreciation of his situation, "give these fellers orders to foller the horses back to camp, do you hear me? My arms is gittin' tired, and I may let go any minute. Tell 'em to go, and go in a hurry—that's all that can save you."

Rojas had been cursing, praying and making all kinds of lavish promises from the moment that Rodgers first dangled him over the cliff. There had been such a clatter and yelling and noise of shooting that Rodgers had heard little of it, and he had heeded less. He would not have taken the old thief's word for the makings of a cigarette.

"I'm choking! For the sake of our Blessed Señor lift me up!" he begged.

"Send every man of 'em back to camp, or down you go! I'll give you three to speak. One——"

Rojas shouted the order, and the men, glad enough, such of them as had not already retreated, to be off, hurried up the trail. In a moment they were out of sight around the nearest turn.

"I'll hold you here till they're gone," said Rodgers, "but my arms may give out any minute—I feel my grip slippin' now."

ALL was quiet in the road below. One *rurale* lay there, still. The other two who had fallen had crawled back out of sight.

"Run down the trail and call 'em," said Rodgers, speaking to the girl, who was clinging to the trunk of the tree for protection against the bullets which had lately been clipping the leaves overhead. "Hurry 'em up; you can't depend on these fellers, they may all of 'em be down here on us in a minute more."

"For God's sake, señor!" pleaded Rojas.

"Shut up!" commanded Rodgers, slamming him against the cliff.

When the rurales gathered under the live-oak, Rodgers held out a cartridge-belt toward them, with a comprehensive gesture over the margin of the cliff.

"It broke," said he.

RODGERS found things exactly as he left them in camp on the "God-blessed side" of the river, as he called his native shore. There was the water-keg, simmering in the sun; and there was his rifle leaning against his cot, and his pistol hanging on the tent-pole. Rodgers fondled them, with a deep, reverential appreciation.

"Serves me right," said he, "serves any feller right that puts his gun down on a job like this."

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Winter Fishing

by Frederick William Wallace.

Another yarn of the Harvesters of the Shoals

WINSLOW glared under sullen brows at the lowering sky and turned aggressively to Jimmy Thomas, who was hanging on his dory-painter at the main rigging.

"I kin see it's dirty-looking, but I'll make a day of it in spite of th' weather——"

"Waal, Fred Hanson has his dories all aboard, Harry," answered the old fisherman, "an' ye can't take chances with th' weather on Brown's in th' month o' January. Th' glass has been a-tumblin' all day——"

"I don't care ef it has or not," growled the skipper. "I've got the chance to git a deck o' fish to-day an' I'm a-goin' t' git it. We've been lying-to for nigh six days now, an' 'tis about time we got a trip——"

"Ef ye'll take my advice, ye'll make this th' last set," persisted Thomas. "There's a southeaster a-makin' up an' it'll come on quick an' sudden."

Winslow was in an ill humor. He considered that the elements were thwarting him in his efforts to make a successful trip, and Jimmy Thomas's advice was unfavorably received.

"I'll be hanged ef I ever knew sich an old croaker as you, Jimmy. 'Tis a regular Foul Weather Jack you're becomin', an' I wish ye'd mind yer own business. I'll look after th' weather—you look after th' fishin'."

Thomas looked at the skipper sharply. "Don't talk like a fool, Harry," he said bluntly. "Ye know what has happened in th' past by fellows riskin' th' weather an' runnin' chances. If *you* don't, *I* do; an' ye don't want t' listen to anythin' I say, it seems——"

This was too much for Winslow's pride and he resented the old fisherman's manner of speaking.

"You've got too—— much t' say aroun' here, an' I don't want your advice. Keep on fishin' until I tell ye t' knock off or else stay aboard. When I want yer advice I'll ask ye for it; so git yer bait an' clear out."

Thomas's dorymate, Will Jackson, clambered out of the hold with a bucket of bait, as the skipper strode angrily away to the wheel, and he placed the bucket down and stared calmly at the rising swell and ragged stormy sky.

It was becoming dark already and the sunless January day was drawing to a close. The gulls, those ever-present trailers of the Bank fishermen in winter, had mysteriously disappeared, and Jimmy Thomas glanced apprehensively to windward, while the skipper, at the wheel, glared at him resentfully.

"What'll we do, Jimmy?" queried Will Jackson, ignoring the skipper's savage glances.

"Git th' torches an' jump in," answered the old man. "We'll make th' set."

Shipping the oars, they pulled away into the gathering darkness.

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FIVE tubs had been set and hauled by each dory that day and, in the light of the torches, the crews ranged alongside the schooner and pitched out their fish in a swell which called for unusual dexterity on the part of the dorymates.

Winslow was happy. He had wrested a huge fare from the waters of the Bank and there was a gladsome light in his eyes as he took in the overflowing pens and fish-littered decks.

"Great work, boys," he said, as the last dory came up on the tackles. "Git yer suppers now an' start in dressing down. There's dirty weather ahead of us an' a thunderin' lot o' work t' do. All dories aboard?"

"All but Will Jackson an' Jimmy Thomas," answered a man.

Winslow started.

"By th' Great Trawl Hook! I clean forgot him. What tub is he on? Fifth?"

"No, skipper. He's settin' his sixth now. Jest went down as we was a-comin' in."

"Sixth?" ejaculated the skipper. "Why I thought he was only on his fifth! What in th' —— did that ol' fool want t' make another set for?"

"You told him, skipper," remarked a man pitching fish in the after-pen.

"Yes, I know I did," replied Winslow petulantly. "I was kinder riled this afternoon. Logan! Lay aloft an' see ef ye kin locate him. I cal'late he's somewheres t' wind'ard. Thunderation! It's gittin' thick to th' s'uth'ard. D'ye see anything?"

"Nawthin' but another vessel dressing down!"

Jumping below into the cabin, the skipper pulled a pair of binoculars from under his bunk mattress and threw a hasty glance at the barometer. The sight caused him to pause and scrutinize the instrument with evident perturbation.

"Twenty-nine two!" he muttered. "Holy Sailor! She's tumbling—an' one dory still out. ——!"

There was a half-breathed prayer on his lips as he jumped for the companion and scoured the darkening sea. Far to leeward the glare of torches marked a vessel cleaning her catch, but not a sign could he see of the lone torch-flare betokening a dory engaged in making a night-set.

"Sight anything?" he bawled to Logan at the masthead.

"Nawthin'," came the answer from the darkness aloft.

"Stand by for about! Git th' horn goin' some one! Knock off now, everybody, an' keep a look-out for that dory. Th' fish? —— th' fish! Thomas an' Jackson are out there somewheres an' it's a-goin' t' blow like —— soon!"

WINSLOW'S voice almost rose to a shriek as he uttered the final words. The storm was coming. He could sense it in the rising lift of the sea, in the clammy chilliness of the breeze coming out of the southeast; and the young skipper's heart was encircled with the cold grip of fear.

It's not a nice thing to get men astray on the Banks in Winter, and his imagination pictured the stubborn old fisherman and his dorymate out there in the darkness, tossing and heaving on the rising sea. And he, in his thoughtlessness, had sent them out! Sent them out in the wintry darkness with a southeaster close aboard, and all because he was too ill-natured to take advice from an old and true shipmate. As he tugged at the wheel of the reeling schooner, his heart was being flayed by the whip-lash of conscience.

A damp puff of air smote him in the face and, in the light which streamed from the binnacle and cabin-skylight, he could see that snow was commencing to fall. The sea and sky to windward appeared as one solid wall, dense, opaque and heavy with ominous portent. Some one shouted, and the lights of the vessels to leeward disappeared as though a mighty hand had snuffed them out.

Down came the squall. Logan's hail of its advance was dashed back in his teeth and the schooner, under three whole lowers, rolled down to the blast, while the air was filled with flying sleet and the whirring drone of the wind.

The fish piling the decks slithered like an oily wave over the lee rail and the crew staggered, slipped and tripped in the slimy mass as they jumped for rigging and weather-rail.

Winslow, with his mind brought back to present exigencies, ground the wheel over with a superhuman effort until the vessel came to the wind and amid the thunderous rattle and bang of gear, his voice was heard in a steady, iron-lunged roar.

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"Down with th' mains'l! All hands aft here!"

The huge seventy-five-foot boom was fetching up on the slackened tackles with nerve-rending shocks, and in the inky blackness the men raced aft to subdue the demon with fists, profanity and rude remarks. The heavy main-sheet blocks swayed and thumped to the jerks of the thrashing boom, and aloft in the awe-inspiring gloom the huge mainsail flapped in thunderous reports.

"Main-sheet!" roared Winslow above the din. "Bring her aboard! Git th' crotch shipped. Ready with your tackles! Slack up your boom-lift! Lower away easy! Steady on th' downhaul! Tie her up! All fast? Take th' wheel, Henderson. Heave her to on th' starb'd tack—— I'm going below."

With a sympathetic "All right, Harry," the fisherman grasped the spokes. He knew what the young skipper's thoughts were, and Winslow, as he lay in his bunk, oblivious to the low whispers of the men coming below and the howl of the gale outside, passed through the hell of conscience for a bitter hour.

They were gone! two of the men who had followed him trip after trip since he started as skipper. One of them had been his dorymate in the old days; and now he had repaid their devotion by sending them to their death on the chill, dark waters of the Bank.

II

WHEN he left the vessel after his tiff with the skipper, Jimmy Thomas and his dorymate pulled silently to windward. In silence they hove out the sling-ding and prepared to set the baited trawl.

Jackson was the first to speak.

"Th' skipper's beginnin' t' git like all th' rest of them. After they git a vessel an' make a few high-line trips, they know everythin' an' ye can't tell 'em nawthin'. He'll be as big a swab as Fred Hanson afore he's a year older."

Old Jimmy finished heaving out the trawl and, making the buoy-line fast to the dory, pulled out his pipe and lit up.

"You're wrong, Bill," said the old man calmly. "Harry Winslow 'll never be a man of th' Fred Hanson type, for he's a good lad an' allus will be. He was a bit hasty in his talk maybe, but he's young an' anxious t' make a trip after sich a poor Winter. He's a young man to go as skipper, an' skippers hev a lot o' worries we common ornery trawl-haulers ain't got. So ye'll hev t' excuse th' lad his little bit o' jaw."

Jackson was an easy-going man with a childlike faith in his older dorymate and like a child he coincided readily with a stronger mind.

"I cal'late you're right, Jimmy," he said. "Let's haul now an' git aboard. 'Tis dirty-lookin' to th' s'uth'ard thar'."

With a torch flaring on the dory-gunwale the two proceeded to haul the gear. A few fathoms had scarce come in over the roller when the dory side-wiped a sharp, short comber which extinguished the torch, and, while Jackson was endeavoring to relight it again, the squall hit in. The trawl-line, which, for the time being, had been hitched around the heaving-stick stuck into a thole, parted as the dory rose on a sea, and they were adrift in the howling darkness.

As quick as thought, Thomas hove the dory anchor over and paid out the roding to the bitter end.

"Five shot o' new gear gone," he cried to his dorymate, who was plying the oars and nursing the rearing dory over the hissing combers. "I cal'late we'll hang on till this blows past. Whew! ain't it a blinder? Blowin' an' snowin' an' black as the inside o' a jack-boot. See any sign o' th' vessel, Bill?"

"I kin see nawthin'," panted Jackson.

Both men were aware of their danger, though neither voiced his fears.

Astray on the Bank with a gale of wind blowing, on a dark midwinter night, is a situation few fishermen ever care to be in, or even think about, and an eighteen-foot dory is a pitifully frail craft to brave the rage of a North Atlantic Winter on open water. Trusting to the slender twenty-four-pound line to hold them to their position, the two fishermen laid-to their oars and maneuvered the dory among the huge seas that were now rising to the lash of the wind.

"We'll hang on here as long as the anchor will. Winslow 'll beat up to us an' it's better t' keep yer position than t' let go an' wander all over th' Bank a-lookin' for th' vessel. Let th' vessel look for us. Can't

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git that torch alight, ye say? Wet, is it? That's bad. It'll give Winslow no chance t' make out where we are—— Thunder an' blazes! Th' blame anchor's parted! Head her up to it or we'll be over!"

SHYING and cavorting like an untamed broncho, the dory started to whirl down to leeward and, though it was snowing heavily and bitterly cold, the two men perspired with their exertions as they tugged with short strokes at the oars. Thomas punctuated his efforts with occasional bursts of lurid profanity, with a reckless disregard to the probability of his precipitation into Eternity at a moment's notice, and his dorymate worried over the fact that he was hungry.

"Ain't no sign o' th' vessel, Will. I cal'late we're a-goin' t' spend th' whole blank night out here, an' that ain't what I'm hankerin' after."

Jackson grunted assent. "Gee!" he said, "Wouldn't I jest like t' be muggin'-up now, Jimmy. An' th' cook was a-makin' doughnuts an' lemon pies fur supper!" Jackson's mouth watered at the thought. "Say, Jimmy," he added, "that squall ain't easin' off any. There's th' very —— of a sea runnin' now an' it's snowin' thicker'n ever."

"Aye," answered the other. "She's black an' dirty to-night, for sure. Give us a chew, Will."

Hour after hour went by and still they reeled and whirled about on the wind-harried waters. Moments there were when a creaming crest threatened to overwhelm them, but a skilful lunge of the oars sent the little boat mounting the menace without shipping a bucketful of water. It was hard, nerve-straining work—a veritable game with Death—and, as the minutes went by and no sign of a vessel, both men knew that their chances of living out the night in such a blow was becoming slim.

In the unequal fight, the hungry sea was bound to win, and a momentary relaxation of their vigilance would see them overturned by a snarling crest. Then, it would be all up with them.

"What d'ye think of our chances for bein' picked up?" queried Jackson.

Thomas made no bones about his reply.

"Purty —— small, Will. This blow 'll have sent all th' fishermen hereabouts a-swingin' off for shelter. This flurry is only commencin', an' afore long it'll stiffen inter a rare ol' southeaster an' blow for days, maybe. I cal'late th' best we kin do is t' put th' dory before an' make th' land. Th' Seal Island lays 'bout fifty or sixty miles off ——"

"A long run, Jimmy, in a sea like this."

"Aye, 'tis a long run, but better t' take th' chanst than blow aroun' out here."

"Any water in th' jar?"

"No, Will."

"Any grub in yer pockets?"

"Nawthin'."

Jackson bit off a quid and remarked phlegmatically, "—— of a nice fix we're in, Jimmy. Shall I h'ist th' dory-sail an' let her run?"

"Aye, reef it an' set it. I'll steer."

For two long hours, under the small rag of sail, the little craft surged and swooped over the foam-laced seas in the Stygian darkness, and her two occupants communed with their thoughts. Both were married men with children and, as they drove through the night, a white sleet-covered phantom, their minds were full of the fancies which come to men facing death.

"This Winter fishin's no life for a man," remarked Jackson, after a lengthy interval.

"'Tis no life for any one that ain't a man," corrected Thomas. "It's takin' big chances an', Billy-boy, it takes men with plenty o' nerve t' do it. D'ye see anythin' ahead thar', Bill? My eyes are waterin' with starin' so long in th' dark, but I thought I saw a light t' loo'ard."

Jackson peered into the wall of blackness ahead and endeavored to pierce the opaque veil.

"Can't see a blame thing. It's black as the inside o' Tophet," he shouted.

Then the dory climbed over the shoulder of a cresting grayback and a red light flickered almost overhead.

"Round her up—an' quick!" yelled Jackson. "We're slammin' dead into a vessel, by th' Lord Harry——"

CRASH! Into the port-broadside of a large schooner went the careering dory and, as she struck the hull, both men made a mighty leap for the vessel's rail and tumbled inboard upon a slush-covered deck.

"Waal, ef that ain't a —— of a way t' come aboard a vessel!" cried a man stand-

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ing aft on the schooner's quarter. "Who's that anyway?"

"We're from th' *Winslow*," said Thomas, when he had recovered his breath. "Made a night-set an' got adrift."

"Why, blast me, 'tis Jimmy Thomas," said a voice. "Say, you ol' scut, what kind of a night is this t' be makin' night-sets? Gittin' tired o' life? An' what d'ye mean by slappin' inter us like ye did? By th' Great Hook Block! I thought we were rammed by a blame' steamboat——"

"Keep a-joggin', shipmate," answered the other. "What vessel's this anyway?"

"What vessel sh'd it be but th' *Camisoto* —th' newest an' best out of Anchorville. Come for'ard, you two, an' git interjuced. Oh, skipper! Here's a couple *Winslow* fellers blowed aboard. Didn't like their own craft so jest flew aboard here an', by th' same token, —— near sinkin' us as they came alongside."

And after entering the foc'sle, they were greeted with rough courtesy by the *Camisoto's* skipper, Jim Costello, a huge, red-headed Gloucester Irishman.

"Draw to, boys, an' mug-up. 'Tis a bitter night t' be adrift, an' I cal'late ye're lucky, ay, darn lucky, ye hit us th' way ye did, even ef ye came at us bows-on an' hell-fur-leather."

As the big skipper lurched past them on his way to the ladder, Thomas was distinctly aware of the odor of liquor and, when seated at the foc'sle table, it needed no great powers of observation to perceive that several of the gang lolling around were decidedly the worse of drink.

"Oho," muttered Jimmy to himself. "Fishin' must be high-line when there's a kag o' rum floatin' around. Not but what it's a good thing to have aboard a vessel Winter fishin'—though I don't like t' see *too* much of it on a vessel at sea. Especially with th' gangs Jim Costello ships."

And Jimmy gave an ominous shake of the head.

III

AFTER a mug-up of hot beans, ginger-cake and coffee, the two dorymates were indulging in a soul-satisfying smoke when the skipper sent for them to come aft. Entering the cabin, they found the place crowded with men smoking and playing cards on the lockers and having, to all appearances, a good time. Thomas noted the hour, one o'clock, and mentally disapproved of the two stone jugs to which the uproarious gang were applying themselves.

"Come an' have a nip, boys!" bawled Costello, and his voice boomed above the chatter of the carousers and the roar of wind and sea. "'Tis a little health we're drinkin' to th' vessel an' her luck. What d'ye think o' her, fellers? She's a fine able craft, hey? I cal'late neither th' *Winslow* nor Fred Hanson's sharp-hulled pedler c'n show th' *Camisoto* a stern-wake. She kin trim anythin' aroun' these coasts, sailin' or fishin', so she kin. Four days on th' grounds an' a hunder' an' forty thousan' below. Kin ye beat that, you *Winslow* men? Come on! Toss her off an' give th' ship a good name!"

Passing the stone jug over, Captain Costello commenced a boastful dithyrambic upon the virtues of his new vessel, turning every now and again for confirmation from one or other of the hard-looking crowd lolling upon the lockers.

They *were* a hard crowd, to say the least, for a tough skipper like Jim Costello always has a daredevil, fearless gang of men trailing after him. They worked hard, lived hard and incidentally drank hard, and their reputations when ashore were unsavory. Bartenders on Atlantic Avenue, Boston, knew Costello's gang and telephoned for the police when they entered their saloons, while the rumsellers and "blind pig" proprietors in the baiting-ports of the North Shore and Treaty Coasts nerved themselves for trouble when they landed on their beaches.

As the two stone jars circulated, the crowd became argumentative and quarrelsome and, with no desire to become involved in a drunken argument, Thomas and Jackson discreetly retired to the lockers aft of the companion-steps.

"George Morrissey must ha' bin a fool t' let Jim Costello take this fine vessel," remarked the old man. "Talked him inter it, I cal'late, with his tales o' high-line trips made by him an' his hard-drivin' gang o' Cape Bretoners an' six-foot Judique men. Eh, eh, Will, but I'm tired. 'Twas a hard day we had. Why, th' lad 's asleep already."

Knocking the ashes out of his pipe, old Jimmy kicked his boots off, and threw himself down on the locker.

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THOUGH he essayed slumber many times, his mind persisted in remaining wakefully alert, and for over an hour he hung on the hardwood seat listening to the drunken roisterers aft and the whining roar of the wind overhead. The skipper had been silent for some little time, but at two in the morning he came out of his berth and lurched on deck. A few minutes later, he came below.

"Boys," he said, and old Jimmy listened in nervous apprehension to his words, "I cal'late we'd be doin' well ef we swung her off for home now. We've a full trip an' a high market t' run for, so when ye git a fair wind for home, take it, says I. Maybe we'll git a blasted n'wester t'-morror that'll head us off in th' Bay an' keep us beatin' around for a week, so I cal'late we'll make a runnin'-trip outer this little southerly breeze an' swing off. Up on deck now, fellers, an' h'ist th' mains'l!"

Old Jimmy gave Jackson a prod with his foot.

"Will," he whispered, "d'ye hear what them crazy galoots are a-goin' t' do?"

"Naw!" growled Jackson sleepily.

"They're h'istin' th' mains'l to swing off! Can't ye hear them on deck thar'? Whole mains'l th' drunken swab is givin' her, in a blow like this, an' all hands as drunk as a fiddler's cat! He don't care a hoot for anythin'. Listen to him."

Down the open companion came Costello's hoarse voice:

"Jig her up, boys! Now give her th' jumbo! All ready! Swing her off, Danny! Start yer main-sheet, an' jibe yer fores'l!"

Crash! The foresail had been jibed without tackles, and the shock almost started the decks.

"That's th' style," continued Costello. "Her gear's new an' she'll stand it! No'th by west, Danny, an' drive her, you!"

Jackson was fully awake now. As the vessel swung off the wind, she rolled down and sent the dorymates sliding to leeward.

"Holy Sailor!" cried Jackson. "I'm thinkin' we'd be better off in th' dory, after all. This feller 'll run her under or whip th' sticks over the side. Hark to th' wind."

"Ay, it's blowin' some, Will. An' we've got a kag o' rum pacin' th' quarter an' a kag o' rum to th' wheel. What was it that Gran' Manan, lad, used t' sing:

"A vessel goes under th' devil's thumb,
When th' skipper takes sights through a kag o' rum."

Costello clattered down into the cabin, the snowflakes melting on his beard and shoulders. "Hey, you *Winslow* fellers," he cried, with a hoarse laugh. "We'll give ye a chanst t' meet yer skipper a-comin' inter Anchorville wharf with his flags half-mast in yer honor!"

"Maybe," interrupted Thomas slowly, "but Cap'n Costello, I'd think more o' yer judgment ef ye'd ha' kept yer vessel lyin' to till daylight. On a night like this ye're runnin' a chanst o' half-mastin' more flags than the *Isabel Winslow's*——"

"Back to yer bunk, you ol' croaker!" cried Costello, sarcastically. "I kin run a vessel blind, drunk or sober. I cal'late ye think I'm drunk an' don't know what I'm a-doin'?"

He straightened up to his full six feet and laughed.

"Ha! ha! I reckon ye're gitten' scared. This ain't the *Isabel Winslow*, with her kid skipper an' her longshore crowd o' farmers, an' don't forget it, me bully. You ain't a-sayin', 'Harry, me boy, I wouldn't do this!' or 'Skipper, dear, 'tis a reef in our mains'l we sh'd be takin'!' You don't know me, old son. I'm th' rough, tough Jimmy Costello, see? An' me an' my ways are known from Eastern P'int to th' Treaty Shore, an' ef I kain't drive a vessel in any durn' breeze o' wind aroun' these coasts, I dunno who kin."

Almost unshipping the stovepipes as he lurched drunkenly against them, he reeled into his berth and tumbled, all standing, into his bunk.

"Call me ef it moderates," he cried, with a hoarse laugh at this old fisherman's joke.

IV

WITH two Cape Breton Scotchmen to the wheel, the *Camisoto* was driving into the darkness with the speed of an express-train. It was terrifying, the manner in which the vessel stormed and swooped over the wind-hounded sea. With her great white mainsail full as a balloon with the pressure of the gale, the seventy-five-foot boom bending like a bow and the main-sheet-ropes as taut as bar-iron, the schooner literally tore

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through the cresting surges, and the foam caused by her onslaught roared by on either quarter in great, gleaming, effervescent streaks, which dimly illuminated the red, perspiring faces of the helmsmen.

Swash! With a hair-raising swoop, the overdriven vessel rammed her bowsprit into the back of a solid green comber and drove her bows under, clean to the foremast. Up she came again, streaming and spurting water from every scupper-hole and then, with half her keel out of water, squatted down on a racing, roaring gray-back until she overtook another and drove bowsprit, anchors, windlass and cable out of sight. The gang had retired to their bunks fore and aft, and the foc'sle crowd, with the scuttle drawn tight, were too drunk to pay any attention to the thundering seas which crashed overhead.

Thomas and Jackson squatted in the pen between house and kid and, to their sober eyes, the pace seemed fearful.

"Costello kin carry sail all right," Jimmy shouted in his dorymate's ears, "but I don't like his drivin' in for th' land on a night like this. I don't believe he took a sound afore he swung her off, an' he's put th' log over 'thout windin' it up. Look out!"

The vessel swung around to the push of a gigantic sea and the huge main-boom commenced topping up.

"She's a-goin' t' jibe!"

The two helmsmen managed by superhuman efforts to heave the wheel over as the sail gave a thunderous flap, but the task of keeping the wild yawing vessel steady, in such a wind and sea, was beginning to have a sobering effect upon them. Three times they were within an ace of jibing, and a jibe then would have whipped the masts out of her and, when the strong kicking of the wheel wrenched their muscles and the wheel threatened to become unshipped from the patent gearing, the two Cape Bretoners had enough.

"Oh, there, skipper!" they bawled. "She's takin' charge of us! We can't hold her. Better git th' mains'l in——"

Costello came swearing to the deck.

"Take in nawthin'," he growled. "She's travelin' nicely. Below thar', come up an' relieve wheel! How far's she run? What's th' log read, Joe? Ain't wound up, ye say? Huh! T' blazes with it—they ain't no—— good nohow!"

He jerked the instrument out of the becket and hove it over the side.

IT WAS blowing hard by now, so hard that the new helmsmen were frightened, drunk and all as they were, and it did not take them long to sober up with the exertion of steering in the bitter, snow-filled air. Will Jackson, unafraid in the dory a few hours before, was becoming nervous and Jimmy Thomas's words betrayed the fear in his heart.

"He's crazy, Will. Even ef they wanted to, they couldn't take that mains'l in, now. It's blowin' a whole gale now, an' her drivin' for th' land!"

"Let's go an' make him haul her up," cried the other.

"'Tis no use, lad. He's so chuck full of rum an' pride that he'd never listen to us an', ef I mistake not, a good deal o' this crackin'-on is fur our special benefit. He thinks we'll talk when we git t' home about his rough, bold ways, an' give him a devil of a name among the Anchorville folks. He's been a-sportin' aroun' with that Molly Letourneau, an' a yarn like this would make him th' very deuce o' a boy with th' brazen——"

Crash! The vessel shipped a solid sea which came careering aft, flooding the decks to the rail, and the helmsmen yelled in their fright.

"Hey thar, skipper, we kain't hold her!"

"No, blast ye, ye can't. Send McTavish an' Jock Neale up, some one! Rouse 'em out! They'll sail her, by thunder, ef any one can!"

When two rough-looking characters came on deck and grasped the spokes, the former helmsmen came forward to Thomas and Jackson.

"Skipper's gone crazy," they yelled. "Never knew him do this afore. Useter carry on some, but he's been drinkin' all th' time he's been on th' Bank."

The new helmsmen held her fairly steady, but the gait the vessel was making was proving too much for them. The wild swoops and yaws which she made instilled fear into their drink-obscured brains and, as they sobered up with the exertion of straining at the spokes, they began to realize the awful risk they were running.

Glancing down at the cabin-clock, Thomas saw it was five in the morning, and for three hours the schooner had been run-

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ning on her north-by-west course. It was still dark, and blowing as hard as ever, and the snow shut out all sight within a hundred feet of the vessel. There was no watch forward; all hands except the skipper, the two at the wheel, the two just relieved and Thomas and Jackson, were below, and the schooner was driving in for the land at a sixteen-knot gait.

Costello, standing in the companion, leered tipsily at the little group seated on the house and turned to his henchmen at the wheel.

"She kin sail, this vessel!" he roared. "Give it to her! Drive her! She's a new vessel an' her gear 'll stand!"

And he started to shout a ribald chorus.

"Don't you reckon it's time t' haul up, skipper?" cried one of the relieved helmsmen. "She's been hittin' up an awful clip sence we swung off, an' I cal'late we were well to th' no'th'ard of the Bank when we put th' mains'l on her."

"Oh, is that so, Donald? An' when hev ye taken upon yerself t' keep track o' this vessel's courses? Who's sailin' her—you or me?"

"Naw!" yelled the man. "You're not sailin' her. 'Tis th' rotgut in yer skin that's crackin'-on, ye cursed drunken sweep!"

Whipping out a bait-knife from a cleat, he hove it with all his strength at the leering Costello.

The weapon caught the skipper on the shoulder and drove through the oilskin coat. With a roar like a maddened bull Costello plucked the knife out, and leaping upon the house made for his assailant.

"I'll cut ye, my son," he screamed. "I'll make bait out o' yer hide, my bully!"

As he rushed for the man cowering behind the mainmast, old Jimmy threw himself upon the drink-crazed skipper and both rolled to the deck, snarling and cursing. Though Costello was a strong man, yet the old fisherman was as tough as an ox in spite of his fifty-odd years, and it did not take him five seconds to whisk the knife out of the skipper's hand.

"Stand up, now, you murderin' thief!" bawled Jimmy. "I'll trim you on yer own deck an' take charge——"

For an almost unnoticeable space, he paused and then shouted harshly at the man rising to his feet.

"D' ye hear them, you scum? You've put a finish on things now, for, by ——, ye're in among th' Ledges already!"

"Hard alee! Breakers ahead!" screamed a voice from forward, and the wind had scarce allowed the hail to reach the ears of the horrified listeners, when, surging madly forward on the back of a seething, roaring wall of black water, the vessel fetched up in her career with a fearful, staggering crash.

V

WINSLOW swung his vessel off for home at midnight. The glass was ominously low and he had no heart for further fishing, after losing his two men. About five in the morning, after a wild night in which they furled the mainsail and drove for the land under a reefed foresail, he hauled to the wind and laid-to until daylight. The snow had ceased and it was just breaking down when the watch on deck called Winslow's attention to their dangerous proximity to the land.

"Ye kin see th' Cape from th' masthead, an' there's half a dozen o' them blame' ledges under our lee."

"How's th' Cape bearin'?"

"No'th by east, or thereabouts."

"Git th' ridin'-sail out an' bend it. Up on yer jumbo! We'll run for th' Bay by the inside passage. It'll be a clear run an' smoother water."

It was still blowing hard and a heavy, breaking sea was running, but daylight had robbed the storm of most of its terrors. Under the triangular riding-sail, the reefed foresail and jumbo, the *Isabel Winslow* swung off with her bowsprit pointing northwest by west and, running in the lee of a number of the dangerous underwater ledges which encircle the southern coast of Nova Scotia, she made good weather of the blow and drove for home at a twelve-knot gait.

The Salvage Rock gas and whistling buoy had just been left astern when the lookout hailed from the windlass

"Vessel ashore on Durkee's Le ge!"

From foc'sle and cabin the ng came tumbling up, and Winslow, stanc g on the shearpole, scrutinized the vess through his glasses.

"By th' Lord Harry! 'Tis *Camisoto*—Jim Costello's craft—th' ew one. Come up a little, Wally! Stead Port a little! We'll run down to loo' l an' see what we kin do. God help t m! I'm afraid it's all over with her crow "

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In a few minutes, the wrecked schooner was plainly visible from the *Isabel Winslow's* decks. She was lying over on her side—it was low water then—and the spray was bursting over her in steam-like clouds.

"Any one aboard her, skipper?" queried a dozen anxious voices.

"Ye-e-s! Seems t' me I see somethin' in th' main-riggin'. It may be a tangle o' broken gear. No! It's livin' men all right! They're wavin'! Let me think what I'd better do. I cal'late I'd better not risk heavin'-to aroun' these ledges with th' blame' tides a-rippin' aroun' them. I might git ashore myself. Cal'late we'll run up in th' lee o' th' Ledge an' anchor. Git a twenty-five-fathom range over th' windlass an' see yer starb'd anchor all clear for lettin' go. I'll take th' wheel, Wally. Sheet in, fellers!"

Lurching and pitching in the heavy rips running among the ledges, the schooner ran swiftly to leeward of the wreck and, coming to the wind, shot within a scant cable's length of the wave-swept menace.

"All ready, for'ard? Down jumbo an' fores'l! Let go your anchor!"

As the gang came aft, after seeing all snug, and the vessel riding easily in the lee of the ledge to her best anchor and one hundred and fifty feet of chain, Winslow addressed them:

"Thar's a half a dozen men in th' riggin', as far as I kin see through th' spray, an' I cal'late th' best way t' git them is t' sling a couple dories over an' git them poor beggars t' slide down some o' th' lee gear from th' masthead. She's canted over on her bilge far enough for them t' do that ef they ain't froze stiff. Use your own judgment, boys. Dories away!"

The words were hardly out of his mouth before a rush was made for the dory-tackles, and before Winslow could remonstrate, the gripes were off, and four dories were over the rail, while others were being hastily made ready.

"That'll do, fellers! No need for all hands t' go! Lord save us! Ye'd think 'twas a liner ashore, with th' Government boat a thousand miles away!"

CROWDING the rail, the gang watched the work of the rescuers with anxious eyes. A running fire of comments and ejaculations told of the excitement possessing them:

"Good boy, Henderson! He's got one feller! They're comin' down th' lee riggin' an' jumpin' for th' dory. He's fallen short—Burke's grabbed him—gaffed him like a halibut, by Christopher! How many is there? Six? Seven, ye say? God ha' mercy on th' rest! Wonder ef th' skipper is among them. Lucky thing th' masts stood when she struck!"

"Stand by, now, fellers!" cried Winslow.

The four boats came surging down, impelled by the strong arms of the rowers, and it was evident that only seven of the *Camisoto's* gang had been saved. Henderson's dory was in advance of the rest and he hailed Winslow from a distance.

"Hey, skipper!" he yelled. "Look who's here!"

As Winslow stared at the two heads appearing over the dory-gunwale, he made out the familiar features of his two lost men—Jimmy Thomas and Will Jackson!

With an exultant, boyish whoop, the young skipper grabbed old Jimmy as he came over the rail and, as the men afterward said, "A'most climbed all over ol' Jimmy's frame, an' cussed sinful!"

"Oh, you darned ol' tough! What d' ye mean by runnin' away from me on Brown's an' a'most scarin' me t' death? —— my eyes! I don't know whether I sh'd turn to an' lick th' two o' ye or—— But I might ha' known that no skipper c'd lose sich a pair o' ugly, ornery cusses—ye'd sure git picked up. Oh, Jimmy, but I spent a black night—aye! a bitter night! How'd it all happen—this wreck, I mean?"

The old man passed his hands over his eyes wearily. He too had spent a black night and it pressed upon him.

"Oh, Harry-boy, take an old man's advice an' never go shipmates with a kag o' rum. Aye! I don't like t' pass an ill word upon dead men, but if Jim Costello had left his stone jars ashore he'd ha' been alive now—him an' eighteen men."

"How'd he come away in here? He was with us on Brown's last night."

"Drunk, Harry. Wanted t' show off. H'isted th' whole mains'l on her at two this mornin' an' drove her, aye, hove th' log away, took no soundin's, but drove her slam-bang before it until an hour ago, when she fetched up on th' Ledge. When she struck, th' port-dories and th' cable came over on th' foc'sle-hatch an' jammed th' gang below. Eighteen men died in that

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foc'sle—drowned like rats in a trap—for her bows were under until th' tide fell. Jim Costello was the last to go. Says t' me when he saw what happened,

"'Waal, I cal'late I've done it now. Ef ye git clear, give my love t' Molly Letourneau an' tell George Morrissey that th' *Camisoto* was th' best vessel at runnin' that I ever knowed!'

"That was all he said, an' with that he jumps over th' rail. He was a hard case, Harry—an awful hard case, an' may God have mercy on his soul, for he has many sins to answer for."

"Amen to that!" ejaculated Winslow solemnly.

"I cal'late I'll go below. Sorry, I lost th' dory, skipper——"

"—— th' dory! I'd sooner lose a thousand dories than lose you an' Jackson. Go below an' turn in. We'll look after them other poor fellers, an' 'tis in Anchorville we'll be to-night, thank th' Lord!"

VI

THEY were not destined to make Anchorville that night. Things happen quickly at sea and, while the *Isabel Winslow* had been engaged in the work of rescue, the southeaster had suddenly shifted to the northwest. Instead of riding easily in the lee of Durkee's Ledge, the schooner was now swinging with the Ledge on her port-beam and her bowsprit pointing due west. Astern, some three miles away, lay the long line of breakers betokening the shoal-water of the dangerous Crescent Reef, while to starboard, the St. Paul's, Old Man, John Island and Eudora Ledges practically prohibited navigation among them in anything but a smooth sea and a favoring wind and tide.

Winslow noticed this; noted the direction of the wind, the barometer rising from the low pressure of twenty-nine and the falling thermometer.

"Huh! More dirt!" he muttered. "We'll git it hot an' strong soon, an' us jammed down among them ledges. Ef I kin hang on here until th' wind comes more to th' no'th or till ebb-tide, I kin git out easily, but now we're jammed in a clinch. On deck thar! Give her more chain—ten fathom."

While the skipper studied the compass with visible concern, the wind came away in vicious squalls which caused the schooner to wrench at her chain and fetch up on the windlass with grinding jerks. It was rapidly becoming colder; the slushy sleet of the southeaster changed with the wind into stinging, hard-grained snow and the spray which swashed up over the bows froze on bowsprit-gear and windlass.

"Goin' t' be violent, skipper," remarked Jimmy Thomas, coming on deck. "Glass risin' quick after being low means dirty, sharp weather ahead—wind from th' no'th'ard most likely. Nasty place we're in!"

"I know it. I cal'late we'll give her more chain. She's fetchin' up hard now, an' I'm afraid she'll yank th' windlass outer her. Th' tide's settin' agin us mighty strong. All up, fellers! Bend on th' hawser to th' port anchor an' cockbill it all ready t' let go! Give her th' full scope of th' chain when ye've done that!"

IT WAS blowing hard now and no error. Squall after squall came whirling down, accompanied by skin-cutting hail and snow, and the schooner staggered to their onslaught. All around them, the ledges and reefs were creaming in acres of white water and the decks of the fishing schooner were rapidly filming with ice. The men, overhauling the cable, slipped and slithered around on the glazed planks and cursed the bitter cold, as with numb fingers they beat and hammered the frozen links out of the chain-box and wrestled with an eight-inch manila fishing-hawser almost solidly welded to the cable-rack.

Clank-clink-clank! went the heavy links as the men threw them over the barrel. Crash! And the anchor took up the slack. Out to the bitter end they paid it, then some one hove over one turn too much. Cr-r-r-unch! The vessel made a savage lurch and, before the men could stop it, the turns spun around the iron-shod barrel and in a sputter of sparks the chain slipped through the hawser-pipe.

"Chain's gone!" yelled some one.

"Over with th' port-anchor for th' love o' God!" roared Winslow, and Henderson cut the ring-stopper with the ax.

Shying down to leeward as the great yellow cable crawled over the side, the schooner swung around with a terrific jerk, as the hawser tautened and the anchor bit the bottom.

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"Give her all th' line ye've got!" cried Winslow, "an' see that yer end is made fast."

The hawser, six hundred feet of it, was all that was holding them now, and if that parted—well——

As he thought of the possibility, Winslow glanced over at the now dismasted hulk of the *Camisolo*, rapidly pounding to pieces.

"Lord grant that it holds," he murmured, "or there'll be many widows in Anchorville within the hour."

Another squall whirled down and the reefs around them vanished in the gray-white of a snow storm. From the bows came the ominous hail,

"She's draggin', skipper!"

Winslow ran forward.

"Draggin' ye say? Are ye sure, John? Give me a dory-compass. Durkee's Ledge was 'bout sou'-b'-west. How's she bearin' now? Sou'west ye say? Holy Sailor! She's trailin' that anchor like a piece o' string."

The wind was blowing heavier every minute and the flood-tide was swirling hard against them.

"We're goin' on th' reef, skipper," said old Jimmy. "Onless th' wind shifts or eases up, we're done for!"

The men had gathered aft now and were looking to the young skipper for orders. For an instant he gazed around the stolid, wind-bronzed faces, and his brain worked quickly.

"Where's that Cobtown Harbor man?" he barked.

"Here, sir!"

"You know this locality?"

"Fished around here some in motor-boat."

Winslow jumped below and brought up a chart. Laying it out upon the top of the house, he held a rapid consultation with the fisherman from Cobtown Harbor, and made up his mind.

"Waal, fellers," he said calmly, "ye kin see how we're fixed. I can't beat out o' here, 'cause o' wind an' tide, an' ef we hang to anchor we'll go ashore on th' Crescent Reef astern thar. I'm a-goin' t' take a chance—a fightin' chance, an' Lord help us! Up on th' ridin'-sail! Is that kedge all ready? All right, now—give her fores'l an' jumbo!"

The men jumped to obey orders, with a blind faith in the young skipper's ability to pull them through, although they hadn't the faintest idea of what he intended to do.

AS SOON as the riding-sail was hoisted, Winslow called the Cobtown man to the lee-wheel and both lashed themselves to the box.

"Cut yer cable for'ward!" roared the skipper and, as Thomas severed the great rope with two cuts of the ax, the jumbo bellied to the breeze and the schooner fell off, with her bowsprit pointing to the fuming reefs to starboard.

Was he going to try and weather the reefs? The gang wondered for an instant, but the next order dispelled the supposition.

"Slack away yer fore-sheet!"

The skipper and the Cobtown man rolled the wheel over.

"Now thar', fellers, git below, or lash yourselves to th' riggin'. Draw all slides tight. The *Isabel Winslow* 'll show her qualities this day afore we're through. Over with th' wheel!"

"My God, skipper!" yelled a man in amazement, "ye're puttin' her dead afore it an' slammin' for th' reef!"

"Aye! I'm doin' now on purpose what Jim Costello did in recklessness, but while he lost men, I'm tryin' t' save them. Steady th' helm!"

Like a hound released from leash, the schooner caught the fury of a squall in her sails and bounded for the whirling chaos of maddened water which marked the long crescent-shaped ledge. Standing on the house and at the heel of the mainmast, the men, lashed to boom and fife-rail, stared in fascinated horror at the rapidly nearing breakers and, speechless, mentally ticked off the seconds they had to live.

The vessel seemed to have become imbued with life. She rose steadily on the crest of a sea. With a trembling in every timber, she rushed down the seething declivity with a roar, defiant, like a charger stamping into the fray. Flinging the water off her flooded decks, she stormed forward, irresistible in her onslaught. The two at the wheel braced themselves against their lashings; Winslow with puckered brows, staring calmly ahead, and his helper iron-jawed and desperate.

Crash! A huge sea toppled over the stern and the helmsmen vanished under a foam-streaked cataract of bitter, wind-whipped water. Quickly it sluiced away, and the oil-skinned figures emerged, undismayed and still at their post.

The blue-black of the sea was changing

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to the emerald green of broken water. The roar of the surf was in the ears of the men hanging to the rail and boom. They were now in among the breakers, which toppled over the rail on either side, while a great, translucent wall of brilliant emerald rose astern and threatened to overwhelm them. It wavered for an instant, broke and careered by on either quarter. Up, up, up went the schooner, her bowsprit pointing to the lowering sky, then sky, sea and vessel were blotted out as the men went under in a deluge of icy water.

Cr-r-unch! The schooner struck, staggered for an instant, and drove on.

Crash! Another fearful shock and a deluge of raging sea. Men gasped for breath and, with bursting lungs, murmured choked farewells to the ones at home, while the maddened elements snatched at their numb, frozen bodies and tried to tear them away from their lashings.

For a brief instant they drew breath, listened to the thunder of the surf and gazed upon the fearsome hell of waters which raged around them. Another deluge, and each man felt he was being torn asunder. In their ears rang the sounds heard only by those pressed under by a sea; when lungs expand to breaking, when the breath escapes hissing through the clenched teeth, eyes see red and the mind calls to the tortured muscles to "Let go! Let go!"

At last she came up. It was strangely quiet.

"Was this death?" men asked, till the skipper's voice broke harshly upon the ear.

"All right, fellers! Down fores'l an' jumbo! Leggo yer kedge!"

They had driven clear across the reef!

"Aye! It was our only chance," Winslow was saying. "She couldn't weather any o' them ledges agin wind an' tide. Dories couldn't ha' lived an' even cuttin' away th' sticks wouldn't ha' kept her from draggin'. I knew thar must be some place aroun' here whar' a vessel might scrape over an' when Tom Jenkins here tells me 'bout thar bein' two fathoms on th' southwest horn o' th' reef at high water, I jest slams her over it, trustin' that she'd strike easy. I cal'late she's ground her skag t' flinders. I c'n see pieces of it a-comin' up now——"

With the reaction coming after such a strain, he started to laugh hysterically. "Ha! ha! She's done some poundin' this day. Poor Jim Costello—nineteen men gone t' hell for a jug o' rum! Oh! It's a cruel life—a dog's life!"

And he dropped in a heap upon the ice-covered deck.

THEY hung to the little kedge in the lee of the reef until the gale moderated, and next morning came into Anchorville Bay iced up to the fore-mast-head and with all the gang spelling at the pumps. She was leaking, but not as much as would be expected from a vessel which had banged her way over a shoal-water reef in a Winter's gale.

It had been a wild week at sea and the flags on the Court-House and Post-Office were at half-mast for many of Anchorville's sons. The *Camisolo* was gone, with her skipper and eighteen men. The *Clara Willis* was strewing the rocks of Grand Manan with her wreckage and two dories had failed to answer the muster when her survivors made the beach. Fred Hanson, in the *Minnehaha*, had lost two men reefing the mainsail on Brown's, while Bill McCall, in the *Senator Vincent*, had lost his mainmast off the Seal Island and had to be towed into Yarmouth after a night when all had given themselves up for lost.

It was a week of gnawing anxiety to those who had husbands, sons, fathers and brothers at sea, and, when the *Winslow* came in, battered and storm-worn, they breathed heartfelt thanks unto the Almighty for the safety of another vessel.

"AND what did you make out of it, Harry?" the skipper's pretty wife asked him two days later. All Anchorville knew the story of the *Winslow's* trip and Isabel Winslow had heard the tale from other than the reluctant lips of her husband.

"Waal, sweetheart," answered the young skipper with a laugh, "fish prices are runnin' high these days, an' I cal'late th' gang ain't growlin' over th' seventy dollars they drawed. I might ha' made a hundred, an' I cal'late 'twould be a good idea t' take a little holiday, you an' I, while th' vessel's on th' railway!"

"A hundred dollars!" cried his wife with a note in her voice that Winslow had never heard before. "And what is a paltry hundred dollars to the wives and children of men who live such a life? What is a

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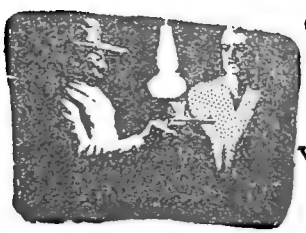
hundred dollars in the scale against the dead of the *Camisoto*—nineteen men—and the poor Anchorville boys lost on the *Minnehaha* and the *Willis?* And the chance *you* took! Driving over that reef! What if you had struck? Did you ever think of that? Look at the risks you have been running those ten days at sea—and all for a hundred dollars! Oh, Harry, but it's cruel, cruel work, and I'm all the time afraid some one will come to my door and tell me my husband's gone——"

"Ha! ha!" laughed the young skipper, clasping his sobbing wife in his strong arms. "Don't think on it, dearie! Even though we did hev a more than ornery excitin' trip, yet a hundred dollars for ten days' work ain't t' be sneezed at. No siree!"

McQuinn, the Sheriff Looks.



by William Tillinghast Eldridge

McQUINN appeared a little odd in his "store clothes" and a little tired and travel-stained.. His stiff collar, if very low—so low that it disclosed his enormous Adam's apple and seamed and browned neck—appeared uncomfortable. His boiled shirt stuck out like some ancient corselet and shone with almost the gleam of burnished metal.

His loose-jointed arms hung across his knees and his stiff, ungainly legs had the appearance of long stems reaching half across the office of the little jail.

"It ain't right, Bill," he was saying. "If things agin the law be goin' on in this county, we should know it. That's what we got afore us to do when we got elected."

The deputy sheriff nodded in a crest-fallen way. "I cal'lated you'd feel that way about it, sheriff, and I was cut up some when them fellers come here and you warn't to home. I was thinkin' to wire you about it."

McQuinn nodded and his lids dropped over his light-blue eyes and lifted quickly, as with an effort.

"They just come?" he questioned.

"Wall," hesitated the deputy, "the feller that come here, inquirin' about it, allowed they had, but I got a notion that feller who's been a-stoppin' up to Widder Brown's be one of 'em."

"Been on the ground. Detectives, Bill, be what you might call foxy; ain't they?"

"A detective be foxy, to my mind," admitted the deputy. "That be why I cal'lated this feller up to the widder's was one of 'em. The feller that come here was a detective, a United States Gov'ment detective, sheriff; he said he be."

"Yes," nodded McQuinn sleepily.

"And I seen him a-talkin' with this feller that was a-stoppin' at the widder's, so I cal'lated they both was detectives a-workin' the thing."

"That," yawned McQuinn, "was what I cal'late a detective would call deduction, Bill."

The deputy swelled with a pardonable pride. It was something to have McQuinn, the sheriff, offer praise, and he so construed the remark.

"I cal'lated you would want to hear about it right away," said the deputy.

"Yes," agreed McQuinn with a tremendous yawn, "fer as I said, Bill, it be our place to see that nothin' unlawful happens in this county. We oughten to have to have them Gov'ment men come here to stop sech things. You and me, Bill, should be spry enough ourselves."

"This be what I call a tickler, sheriff," suggested Bill. "When folks gets to makin' money that ain't money, count'fits, why he be clever."

"Or a born fool," said the sheriff.

"A man that goes agin right and order be that."

"Yes," admitted the sheriff, "or clever, as you say. Now these Gov'ment fellers allow the ones they be after are clever?"

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It was a question, but a very sleepily delivered one, and the sheriff rolled his cud and spat as if he didn't care whether he hit the mark or not; but he did.

"WHY yes," answered Bill. "You see, I cal'late it be this way. That feller at the widder's be one of 'em and he's been lookin' and lookin' and t'other feller comes down and he looks fer a week. Then he come here, to ask you if you can give him a line on any one who would be up to sech devilments as makin' count'fits. Now you ain't here, but I tells him thar ain't a soul in this place to do it; we be mostly law-abidin' people; that we ain't had a real big thing since your sister was murdered and—" but the deputy sheriff stopped short, for he saw a movement upon the part of his superior.

He realized that he was treading upon a ground which was painful to McQuinn, a thing he, above all men, would not be guilty of doing, for certainly, if any one loved the sheriff, it was his assistant.

"I told him—" The deputy scratched his head, a little troubled by reason of his words. "Well, sheriff, as I was sayin', I told him, or I mean, if that feller up to the widder's couldn't find nothin' in a month——"

"A month and two weeks, short a day," corrected the sheriff.

"Land," cried Bill, "you been on to him, sheriff?"

"I didn't know he was a Gov'ment man," smiled McQuinn, his honest blue eyes resting for a moment upon his assistant, "but I do know how long he has been here. Ain't found nothin'; so they decided the hunt ain't here. What be they goin' to do?"

"I didn't know you was to be back today and so I couldn't hold out no hope to 'em of seein' you. They went down to Warren this afternoon, late, to look around thar, and you was to send 'em word when you got back, providin' you thought you had a line on anything fer 'em to follow up."

"I see," agreed McQuinn, getting up. "I cal'late I'll go home and wash up fer supper, Bill. Nothin' doing?"

"Quiet," nodded Bill. "Got one drunk, and old Jimmie Powers is down here, jest to wait till he gets through his mad streak."

"Been beatin' Sarah, has he?" questioned McQuinn from the door. "Beat her bad this time, Bill?"

"No," smiled the deputy. "Since Sarah Powers put in a tel'phone she has been saved some terrible thumpin's. She jest runs fer the parlor, when Jimmie gets goin', locks herself in and tel'phones me. She done so this time and I went up and fetched Jimmie down. Let him go, same as usual, when he 'grees to be good?" And the little deputy began to chuckle softly as he thought of Mrs. Powers and her device for outwitting a periodically infuriated husband.

"Sure," nodded McQuinn, pushing down his hat. "There ain't no use in lumberin' up the courts with these fellers that jest needs a spankin'." And he went out into the street.

The town was quiet. The evening train, upon which the sheriff had arrived, had been in half an hour, and supper was in progress in practically every household.

McQuinn slumped along, tall, angular, slouching. He came to a point opposite the Widow Brown's and hailed a small boy sitting on the fence down a side lane.

"Waal, Jimmie," inquired the sheriff, "he has gone, ain't he?"

"Frank said he had, but I come up to watch, fer I wasn't too sure."

"Yes, he's gone, Jimmie," nodded the sheriff, and he slipped a quarter into the boy's palm.

For a moment, the big knotted hand rested on the boy's rumpled hair and a look that was plaintive and childlike touched the sunburned face of the sheriff. He smiled into the eager face lifted to his, a smile that broadened his huge, unattractive mouth and then he went on his shuffling way and the boy ran off whistling merrily, waving a hand to the guardian of law and order.

In the air was the spirit of Spring, the odors of newly turned earth, the reek of burning leaves, and from window after window, as the sheriff shuffled on, flashed lights out upon the night, with a homely welcome.

There was an added wistfulness in McQuinn's light-blue eyes. He had told Bill that he was going home; more correctly he should have said that he was going to where his sister lived and kept house for him. It was not McQuinn's conception of a home, although he had no reality upon which to base conception.

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II

WITH the stiff collar and equally stiff shirt discarded in favor of a blue flannel one, and supper over, McQuinn was on the street again. He never announced the purpose of his trips, or what their duration might be, and his sister never questioned him.

Now he shuffled along, long arms swinging, head low, eyes apparently upon the ground.

"Count'fit money," he muttered to himself. "That be a crime that shouldn't be allowed nowhere, still less here. Now that feller up to the widder's, well, he has been doin' a heap of prowlin'—looking for a farm, he said. I knowed that he warn't. Them boys proved that."

For the first time a smile, a tired smile too, touched the sheriff's lips. "To think on me havin' a Gov'ment man watched," and with this dryly put remark he stopped talking to himself and turned down a side street.

It was two o'clock in the morning before the sheriff was back home and in bed. At seven he was at the jail, in the office on the second floor. His deputy did not inquire as to whether he should wire the Government men at Warren; he had told the sheriff of their whereabouts, what they wanted, and it was not his place—rather would it have been a most uncalled-for thing—if he had mentioned them again.

The sheriff dozed a good part of the day in his chair, with his feet on the window-ledge. Late in the afternoon he had a talk with Jimmie Powers, sent the man back to his cell, smiled at Jimmie's threats to have him prosecuted for locking him up without a charge being placed against him and then went home earlier than usual.

His supper over, he was out on the street again, walking along, loose-armed, shuffling, head bowed. At three o'clock in the morning, he was at home and in bed, at six he was up and in his buggy, driving toward the country.

THE jail did not see him all that day, but at dusk a note was handed to the deputy. It was from McQuinn, and asked his assistant to remain on duty until he sent him word that he might go home. When the deputy got this message he looked to his revolver, slipped two dozen cartridges into his pocket and sat down to wait, a small, nervously anxious man. Nothing might come of it, anything might happen.

Out in the country, where McQuinn was, the darkness of the Spring night had closed in. Sleepy birds chirped in the bushes along the roadside, crickets gave forth their plaintive sounds from the meadow grass, and over by a big white farmhouse a whippoorwill called for its mate.

Near the lane leading to the farmhouse, a shadow moved. As the darkness increased, the shadow went up the lane. At the back of a clump of fragrant lilac bushes it straightened, tall, angular, loose-jointed.

After a little the sheriff moved close to the house and, while he stood leaning indolently against the clapboards, his eyes traveled the plowed land, acre upon acre. He thought of the well-stocked barns, the cattle that had come to the farm within the past year, and he smiled that tired smile of his.

Mr. Bower was one of those city men who had heard the "back to the soil" cry. He had bought the old Pond place, refitted the house, stocked the barns and placed a man in charge. Mr. Bower traveled back and forth. His family was still in town. His wife had been taken ill very suddenly and had been obliged to go to the hospital.

The place bore out these reports in every respect, McQuinn knew it only too well.

At a little after eight o'clock—as anticipated by McQuinn—a man came up the lane. The sheriff straightened, slipped around the corner of the vine-covered porch and, for one so very big and ungainly, sunk down into a small space. On came the man. He reached the steps, raised one foot to ascend and was wrenched backward as if in the grip of a maelstrom.

The man knew that a hand was upon his mouth, an arm like a steel band about his body, and then, as his flashing eyes caught a glimpse of the face bent close to his, he knew that it was the sheriff of the county who was taking such liberties with him.

The hand came off his mouth suddenly, but before he could utter the cry of warning his throat tried hard to frame, fingers—long, strong, knotted—were in his neck. Then the choking let up, as suddenly as it had begun, and a wadded cloth was driven into his mouth.

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The next instant, while a knee set uncomfortably hard upon his chest, he felt a rope go round his body. When he was tied and gagged, beyond any possible question of his being able to move or call, McQuinn dropped him in a clump of bushes and walked up to the front door.

THE sheriff knocked loudly and boldly. The door opened instantly, as if some one had been expected, but the look upon the face of the man who held the lighted lamp might have been construed to mean that it was not the sheriff.

"How de do?" drawled McQuinn. "Didn't cal'late to see me this time of night, now did you, Mr. Bower? No. Waal, the facts be, I ain't got much time durin' the day, and when Jim Pond wrote me to see you about the place, why I had to take the first chance I had to come out. Kin I see you fer a few minutes, or if I can't, I'll come again, jest as well as not."

There was just the merest moment of hesitancy. "No—no, come in, do," and Mr. Bower stepped back.

The sheriff shuffled into the little white hall. There was just about room for the two men. McQuinn had known the house when former owners had had it. To the left was a door into the old parlor. To the right, the narrow, twisting stairs that led to the upper floor. Under the stairs, a low door that opened into a dark and stuffy closet hardly high enough for a man to stand upright in.

"Pond wanted you to see me?" questioned Mr. Bower. "Glad to see you of course, sheriff, but I can't for the life of me see what Pond could want you——"

"Jest what I can explain in a—— No, don't bother to take me in. Won't be but a minute. Jest let me get my rubbers off. I do have—have—swelled—swelled feet turrible—I——"

McQuinn was balancing on one foot, tugging at a refractory rubber. He swayed, tried to steady himself, and pitched full tilt into Bowers.

With a cry for the man's clumsiness, the owner of the place threw out one hand. Up went McQuinn's ungainly arms, one struck the lamp and sent it, with a crash, to the floor, plunging the hall in darkness.

At the same instant Mr. Bower felt two arms go about his waist, and although he struggled and fought—and he could struggle and fight, for he was well built and heavy—he was driven back against the wall. The next instant, the door to the closet under the stairs came open and Bower was tossed into the narrow space. With his knee McQuinn held the door and turned the wooden button.

THEN he leaped back and swung around the stair-post and went half-way up. In his hand lay the revolver which he had yanked from Bower's pocket. He had not troubled yet to draw his own weapon.

The blows which fell upon the wooden door were terrific, the shouts of the prisoner came loud but muffled. It was what McQuinn had counted upon. No intelligent words would come from the depths of the closet to warn, only a mad bellow that would attract.

"If that button holds," whispered Mc Quinn, looking down. Then he raised his head, for racing footsteps came from the rear of the house. The parlor door swung open and, light in hand, a young man appeared. For a second he viewed the broken lamp upon the floor, the dark stain of kerosene, and then his hand went out quickly toward the button on the closet-door.

"Don't!"

The man's lifted hands—one for the button, one holding the lamp—never moved as his eyes raised to the face peering down upon him over the white stair-rail.

"And keep your hands up. You know me, same as they did. Steady, I'll shoot mortal straight, if I must."

The man with the lamp stood for one second as if struck dumb. What he would have done the next minute there is no telling, but lanky McQuinn swung over the rail, landed face to face with him and gave him no time to move.

Out went the sheriff's hand. The man's revolver was flung into the middle of the dark parlor. Then McQuinn took the lamp and set it in the rack overhead. All the time the muzzle of Bower's revolver in the sheriff's huge gaunt hand pressed the fat of the prisoner's stomach.

With the lamp disposed of, McQuinn pushed his prisoner against the wall and drew forth a second piece of clothes-line. His light-blue eyes were upon those other eyes, so close to his. A slow, childish,

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trusting, smile curved his lips, and all the time that even, soft, drawling voice whispered that the man should hold steady, and then—he had him bound hand and foot.

"Now," said McQuinn to the white closet-door, "I am ready fer you, Mr. Bower. One man be in the lilac bushes—that sweet young college farmer you told the village about; the other feller—engraver they call 'em, I take it—is here, tied up. My team be waitin' fer you."

There was no answer.

"Thar," smiled McQuinn, "how *kin* you?" and he spun the button on the door.

"I ain't had no supper and I'm kinder tired," complained McQuinn. He took down the lamp, set it on the floor where its rays lighted the open door of the closet and butted his revolver. Then he went in.

There was the rush of something from the blackness under the stairs, the sharp move of feet, a grunt, deep breathing, and McQuinn came out with Bower at the end of one of his long, lanky arms. And he carried Mr. Bower by the seat of his trousers, not by the nape of his neck.

"BILL," yawned McQuinn, "you wired them chaps to Warren? Yes," in answer to his deputy's nod, "them Gov'ment men. Bill, I'll let 'em go out and fetch the plates and stuff." The sheriff lay back in his chair and yawned.

"Say, sheriff," gasped Bill—for the deputy had just had time to bundle three men into three cells and send a telegram—"how in thunder did you think of Bower's place?"

"Why, Bill," with a slow smile and the light-blue eyes on the remains of a waste-paper-basket in the corner, "I knowed where that feller up to the widder's looked and so I knowed thar warn't no use lookin' thar. I knowed some folks around here was honest and some too dum' big fools to mix in a thing like this, so I knowed thar warn't no use lookin' thar. I didn't know that a city feller—though I ain't saying some can't—could make a go of a farm and so I looked thar. When them Gov'ment men get here, I cal'late we'll know if I looked right." And McQuinn the sheriff spat.

I Played the Game

By Isabel Chase

Dedicated to The Adventurers' Club of New York City

I HOPE there'll be a judgment day,
So folk will understand
I played the game almighty fair—
Just made the best of my two pair,
With "three" in neighbor's hand.

I didn't try to steal the pot,
Though neighbor thinks he knows
Just how he called "my little bluff"
The time he won the precious stuff,
And so of course it goes!

Perhaps when cards are dealt last round
And I and neighbor play,
When waiting at the Golden Gate,
I'll fill a flush to kill his straight
Held pat on show-down day!

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For the Salt Which He Had Eaten

by Talbot Mundy

PROLOGUE

PEACE WITH HONOR

TO THE northward of Hanadra, blue in the sweltering heat-haze, lay Siroeh, walled in with sun-baked mud and listless. Through a wooden gate at one end of the village filed a string of women with their water-pots. Oxen, tethered underneath the thatched eaves or by the thirsty-looking trees, lay chewing the cud, almost too lazy to flick the flies away. Even the village goats seemed overcome with lassitude. Here and there a pariah dog sneaked in and out among the shadows or lay and licked his sores beside an offal-heap; but there seemed to be no energy in anything. The bone-dry, hot-weather wind had shriveled up verdure and ambition together.

But in the mud-walled cottages, where men were wont to doze through the long, hot days, there were murmurings and restless movement. Men lay on thong-strung beds, and talked instead of dreaming, and the women listened and said nothing—which is the reverse of custom. Hanadra was what it always had been, thatched, sun-baked lassitude; but underneath the thatch there thrummed a beehive atmosphere of tension.

In the center of the village, where the one main road that led from the main gate came to an abrupt end at a low mud wall, stood a house that was larger than the others and somewhat more neatly kept; there had been an effort made at sweeping the enclosure that surrounded it on all four sides, and there was even whitewash, peeling off in places but still comparatively white, smeared on the sun-cracked walls.

Here, besides murmurings and movement, there was evidence of real activity. Tethered against the wall on one side of the house stood a row of horses, saddled and bridled and bearing evidence of having traveled through the heat; through the open doorway the sunshine glinted on a sword-hilt and amid the sound of many voices rang the jingling of a spur as some one sat cornerwise on a wooden table and struck his toe restlessly against the leg.

ANOTHER string of women started for the water-hole, with their picturesque brass jars perched at varying angles on their heads; and as each one passed the doorway of this larger house she turned and scowled. A Rajput, lean and black-bearded and swaggering, came to the door and watched them, standing proudly with his arms folded across his breast. As the last woman showed her teeth at him, he laughed aloud.

"Nay!" said a voice inside. "Have done with that! Is noticing the Hindu women fit sport for a Rajput?"

The youngster turned and faced the old, black-bearded veteran who spoke.

"If I had my way," he answered, "I would ride roughshod through this village, and fire the thatch. They fail to realize the honor that we pay them by a visit!"

"Aye, hothead! And burn thy brother's barn with what is in it! The Hindus here are many, and we are few, and there will be burnings and saberings a-plenty before a week is past, if I read the signs aright! Once before have I heard such

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murmuring. Once before I have seen *chupatties* sent from house to house at sunset—and that time blood ran red along the roadside for a month to follow! Keep thy sword sharp a while and wait the day!"

"But why," growled another deep-throated Rajput voice, "does the Sirkar wait? Why not smite first and swiftly?"

Mahommed Khan moved restlessly and ran his fingers through his beard.

"I know not!" he answered. "In the days when I was Risaldar in the Rajput Horse, and Bellairs sahib was Colonel, things were different! But we conquered, and after conquest came security. The English have grown overconfident; they think that Mussulman will always war with Hindu, the one betraying the other; they will not understand that this lies deeper than jealousy—they will not listen! Six months ago I rode to Jundhra and whispered to the General sahib what I thought; but he laughed back at me. He said 'wolf! wolf!' to me and drew me inside his bungalow and bade me eat my fill."

"Well—what matters it! This land has always been the playground of new conquerors!"

"There will be no new conquerors," growled the old Risaldar, "so long as I and mine have swords to wield for the Raj!"

"But what have the English done for thee or us?"

"This, forgetful one! They have treated us with honor, as surely no other conquerors had done! At thy age, I too measured my happiness in cattle and coin and women, but then came Bellairs sahib, and raised the Rajput Horse, and I enlisted. What came of that was better than all the wealth of Ind!"

He spread his long legs like a pair of scissors and caught a child between them and lifted him.

"Thou ruffian, thou!" he chuckled. "See how he fights! A true Rajput! Nay, beat me not. Some day thou too shalt bear a sword for England, great-grandson mine. Ai-ee! But I grow old."

"For England or the next one!"

"Nay! But for England!" said the Risaldar, setting the child down on his knee. "And thou too, hothead. Before a week is past! Think you I called my sons and grandsons all together for the fun of it? Think you I rode here through the heat because I needed exercise or to chatter like an ape or to stand in the doorway making faces at a Hindu woman or to watch thee do it? Here I am, and here I stay until yet more news comes!"

"Then are we to wait here? Are we to swelter in Siroeh, eating up our brother's hospitality, until thy messengers see fit to come and tell us that this scare of thine is past?"

"Nay!" said the Risaldar. "I said that I wait here! Return now to your own homes, each of you. But be in readiness. I am old, but I can ride still. I can round you up. Has any a better horse than mine? If he has, let him make exchange."

"There will be horses for the looting if this revolt of thine breaks out!"

"True! There will be horses for the looting! Well, I wait here then and, when the trouble comes, I can count on thirteen of my blood to carry swords behind me?"

"Aye, when the trouble comes!"

There was a chorus of assent, and the Risaldar arose to let his sons and grandsons file past him. He, who had beggared himself to give each one of them a start in life, felt a little chagrined that they should now refuse to exchange horses with him; but his eye glistened none the less at the sight of their stalwart frames and at the thought of what a fighting unit he could bring to serve the Raj.

"All, then, for England!" he exclaimed.

"Nay, all for thee!" said his eldest-born. "We fight on whichever side thou sayest!"

"Disloyal one!" growled the Risaldar with a scowl. But he grinned into his beard.

"Well, to your homes, then—but be ready!"

CHAPTER I

A FOREBREATH OF THE MUTINY

THE midnight jackals howled their discontent while heat-cracked India writhed in stuffy torment that was only one degree less than unendurable. Through the stillness and the blackness of the night came every now and then the high-pitched undulating wails of women, that no one answered—for, under that Tophet-lid of blackness, punctuated by the low-hung, steel-white stars, men neither knew nor cared whose child had died. Life and hell-hot torture and indifference—all three were one.

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There was no moon, nothing to make the inferno visible, except that here and there an oil lamp on some house-top glowed like a blood-spot against the blackness. It was a sensation, rather than sight or sound, that betrayed the neighborhood of thousands upon thousands of human beings, sprawling, writhing, twisting upon the roofs, in restless suffering.

There was no pity in the dry, black vault of heaven, nor in the bone-dry earth, nor in the hearts of men, during that hot weather of '57. Men waited for the threatened wrath to come, and writhed and held their tongues. And while they waited in sullen Asiatic patience, through the restless silence and the smell—the suffocating, spice-fed, filth-begotten smell of India—there ran an undercurrent of even deeper mystery than India had ever known.

Priest-ridden Hanadra, that had seen the downfall of a hundred kings, watched through heat-wearied eyes for another whelming—the blood-soaked, sudden flood that was to burst the dam of servitude and rid India of her latest horde of conquerors. But eight hundred yards from where her high brick walls lifted their age-scars in the stifling reek, gun-chains jingled in a courtyard, and, sharp-clicking on age-old flagstones, rose the ring of horses' feet.

Section Number One of a troop of Bengal Horse Artillery was waiting under arms. Sabered and grim and ready stood fifty of the finest men that England could produce, each man at his horse's head; and blacker even than the night loomed the long twelve-pounders, in tow behind their limbers. Sometimes a trace-chain jingled as a wheel-horse twitched his flank; and sometimes a man spoke in a low voice, or a horse stamped on the pavement; but they seemed like black graven images of war-gods, half-smothered in the reeking darkness. And above them, from a window that overlooked the courtyard, shone a solitary lamp that glistened here and there upon the sleek black guns and flickered on the saber-hilts, and deepened the already dead-black atmosphere of mystery.

FROM the room above, where the lamp shone behind gauze curtains came the sound of voices; and in the deepest, death-darkest shadow of the door below there stood a man on guard whose fingers clutched his sword-hilt and whose breath came heavily. He stood motionless, save for his heaving breast; between his fierce, black mustache and his up-brushed, two-pointed beard, his white teeth showed through parted lips. But he gave no other sign that he was not some Rajput princeling's image carved out of the night.

He was an old man, though, for all his straight back and military carriage. The night concealed his shabbiness; but it failed to hide the medals on his breast, one bronze, one silver, that told of campaigns already a generation gone. And his patience was another sign of age; a younger man of his blood and training would have been pacing to and fro instead of standing still.

He stood still even when footsteps resounded on the winding stair above and a saber-ferrule clanked from step to step. The gunners heard and stood squarely to their horses. There was a rustling and a sound of shifting feet, and a "whoa, —— you!" to an irritated horse; but the Rajput stayed motionless until the footsteps reached the door. Then he took one step forward, faced about and saluted.

"Salaam, Bellairs sahib!" boomed his deep-throated voice, and Lieutenant Bellairs stepped back with a start into the doorway again—one hand on his sword-hilt. The Indian moved sideways to where the lamplight from the room above could fall upon his face.

"Salaam, Bellairs sahib!" he boomed again.

Then the Lieutenant recognized him.

"You, Mahommed Khan!" he exclaimed. "You old war-dog, what brought you here? Heavens, how you startled me! What good wind brought you?"

"Nay! It seems it was an ill wind, sahib!"

"What ill wind? I'm glad to see you!"

"The breath of rumor, sahib!"

"What rumor brought you?"

"Where a man's honor lies, there is he, in the hour of danger! Is all well with the Raj, sahib?"

"With the Raj? How d' you mean, Risaldar?"

Mahommed Khan pointed to the waiting guns and smiled.

"In my days, sahib," he answered, "men seldom exercised the guns at night!"

"I received orders more than three hours ago to bring my section in to Jundhra immediately—immediately—and not a word of explanation!"

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"Orders, sahib? And you wait?"

"They seem to have forgotten that I'm married, and by the same token, so do you! What else could I do but wait? My wife can't ride with the section; she isn't strong enough, for one thing; and besides, there's no knowing what this order means; there might be trouble to face of some kind. I've sent into Hanadra to try and drum up an escort for her and I'm waiting here until it comes."

THE Risaldar stroked at his beard reflectively.

"We of the service, sahib," he answered, "obey orders at the gallop when they come. When orders come to ride, we ride!"

Bellairs winced at the thrust.

"That's all very fine, Risaldar. But how about my wife? What's going to happen to her, if I leave her here alone and unprotected?"

"Or to me, sahib? Is my sword-arm withered? Is my saber rusted home?"

"You, old friend! D' you mean to tell me——"

The Risaldar saluted him again.

"Will you stay here and guard her?"

"Nay, sahib! Being not so young as thou art, I know better!"

"What in Tophet do you mean, Mahommed Khan?"

"I mean, sahib,"—the Indian's voice was level and deep, but it vibrated strangely, and his eyes glowed as though war-lights were being born again behind them—"that not for nothing am I come! I heard what thy orders were and——"

"How did you hear what my orders were?"

"My half-brother came hurrying with the news, sahib. I hastened! My horse lies dead one kos from Hanadra here!"

The Lieutenant laughed.

"At last, Mahommed? That poor old screw of yours? So he's dead at last, eh? So his time had come at last!"

"We be not all rich men who serve the Raj!" said the Risaldar with dignity. "Ay, sahib, his time was come! And when our time comes may thou and I, sahib, die as he did, with our harness on! What said thy orders, sahib? Haste? Then yonder lies the road, through the archway!"

"But, tell me, Risaldar, what brought you here in such a hurry?"

"A poor old screw, sahib, whose time was come—even as thou hast said!"

"Mahommed Khan, I'm sorry—very sorry, if I insulted you! I—I'm worried—I didn't stop to think. I—old friend, I——"

"It is forgotten, sahib!"

"Tell me—what are these rumors you have heard?"

"But one rumor, sahib—war! Uprising—revolution—treachery—all India waits the word to rise, sahib!"

"You mean——?"

"Mutiny among the troops, and revolution north, south, east and west!"

"Here, too, in Hanadra?"

"Here, too, in Hanadra, sahib! Here they will be among the first to rise!"

"Oh, come! I can't believe that! How was it that my orders said nothing of it then?"

"That, sahib, I know not—not having written out thy orders! I heard that thy orders came. I knew, as I have known this year past, what storm was brewing. I knew, too, that the heavenborn, thy wife, is here. I am thy servant, sahib, as I was thy father's servant—we serve one Queen; thy honor is my honor. Entrust thy mem-sahib to my keeping!"

"You will guard her?"

"I will bring her in to Jundhra!"

"You alone?"

"Nay, sahib! I, and my sons, and my sons' sons—thirteen men all told!"

"That is good of you, Mahommed Khan. Where are your sons?"

"Leagues from here, sahib. I must bring them. I need a horse."

"And while you are gone?"

"My half-brother, sahib—he is here for no other purpose—he will answer to me for her safety!"

"All right, Mahommed Khan, and thank you! Take my second charger, if you care to; he is a little saddle-sore, but your light weight——"

"Sahib—listen! Between here and Sirooeh, where my eldest-born and his three sons live, lie seven leagues. And on from there to Lungra, where the others live, are three more leagues. I need a *horse* this night!"

"What need of thirteen men, Mahommed? You are sufficient by yourself, unless a rebellion breaks out. If it did, why, you and thirteen others would be swamped as surely as you alone!"

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"Thy father and I, sahib, rode through the guns at Dera thirteen strong! Alone, I am an old man—not without honor, but of little use; with twelve young blades behind me, though, these Hindu rabble——"

"Do you really mean, Mahommed Khan, that you think Hanadra here will rise?"

"The moment you are gone, sahib!"

"Then, that settles it! The memsahib rides with me!"

"NAY, listen, sahib! Of a truth, thou art a hothead as thy father was before thee! Thus will it be better. If the heavenborn, thy wife, stays behind, these rabble here will think that the section rides out to exercise, because of the great heat of the sun by day; they will watch for its return, and wait for the parking of the guns before they put torch to the mine that they have laid!"

"The mine? D' you mean they've——"

"Who knows, sahib? But I speak in metaphor. When the guns are parked again and the horses stabled and the men asleep, the rabble, being many, might dare anything!"

"You mean, you think that they——"

"I mean, sahib, that they will take no chances while they think the guns are likely to return!"

"But, if I take the memsahib with me?"

"They will know then, sahib, that the trap is open and the bird flown! Know you how fast news travels? Faster than the guns, sahib! There will be an ambuscade, from which neither man, nor gun, nor horse, nor memsahib will escape!"

"But if you follow later, it will mean the same thing! When they see you ride off on a spent horse, with twelve swords and the memsahib—d' you mean that they won't ambuscade you?"

"They might, sahib—and again, they might not! Thirteen men and a woman ride faster than a section of artillery, and ride where the guns would jam hub-high against a tree-trunk! And thy orders, sahib—are thy orders nothing?"

"Orders! Yes, confound it! But they know I'm married. They know——"

"Sahib, listen! When the news came to me I was at Siroeh, dangling a great-grandson on my knee. There were no orders, but it seemed the Raj had need of me. I rode! Thou, sahib, hast orders. I am here to guard thy wife—my honor is thy honor—take thou the guns! Yonder lies the road!"

The grim old warrior's voice thrilled with the throb of loyalty, as he stood erect and pointed to the shadowy archway through which the road wound to the plain beyond.

"Sahib, I taught thy father how to use his sword! I nursed thee when thou wert little. Would I give thee false counsel now? Ride, sahib—ride!"

Bellairs turned away and looked at his charger, a big, brown Khaubuli stallion, named for the devil and true in temper and courage to his name; two men were holding him, ten paces off.

"Such a horse I need this night, sahib! Thy second charger can keep pace with the guns!"

Bellairs gave a sudden order, and the men led the brute back into his stable.

"Change the saddle to my second charger!" he ordered.

Then he turned to the Risaldar again, with hand outstretched.

"I'm ashamed of myself, Mahommed Khan!" he said, with a vain attempt to smile. "I should have gone an hour ago! Please take my horse Shaitan, and make such disposition for my wife's safety as you see fit. Follow as and when you can; I trust you, and I shall be grateful to you whatever happens!"

"Well spoken, sahib! I knew thou wert a man! We who serve the Raj have neither sons, nor wives, nor sweethearts! Allah guard you, sahib! The section waits—and the Service can not wait!"

"One moment while I tell my wife!"

"Halt, sahib! Thou hast said good-by a thousand times! A woman's tears—are they heart-meat for a soldier when the bits are champing? Nay! See, sahib; they bring thy second charger! Mount! I will bring thy wife to Jundhra for thee! *The Service waits!*"

The Lieutenant turned and mounted.

"Very well, Mahommed Khan!" he said. "I know you're right! Section! Prepare to mount!" he roared, and the stirrups rang in answer to him. "Mount! Good-by, Mahommed Khan! Good luck to you! Section right! Trot march!"

With a crash and the clattering of iron shoes on stone the guns jingled off into the darkness, were swallowed by the gaping archway and rattled out on the plain.

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THE Risaldar stood grimly where he was until the last hoof-beat and bump of gun-wheel had died away into the distance; then he turned and climbed the winding stairway to the room where the lamp still shone through gauzy curtains.

On a dozen roof-tops, where men lay still and muttered, brown eyes followed the movements of the section and teeth that were betel-stained grinned hideously.

From a near-by temple, tight-packed between a hundred crowded houses, came a wailing, high-pitched solo sung to Siva—the Destroyer. And as it died down to a quavering finish it was followed by a ghoulish laugh that echoed and reëchoed off the age-old city-wall.

Proud as a Royal Rajput—and there is nothing else on God's green earth that is even half as proud—true to his salt, and stout of heart even if he was trembling at the knees, Mahommed Khan, two-medal man and Risaldar, knocked twice on the door of Mrs. Bellairs's room, and entered.

And away over in the distance rose the red reflection of a fire ten leagues away. The Mutiny of '57 had blazed out of sullen mystery already, the sepoys were burning their barracks half-way on the road to Jundhra!

And down below, to the shadow where the Risaldar had stood, crept a giant of a man who had no military bearing. He listened once, and sneaked into the deepest black within the doorway and crouched and waited.

CHAPTER II

A WOMAN, A HIGH-PRIEST AND A SOLDIER—AND THE SOLDIER'S MAN

HANADRA reeks of history, blood-soaked and mysterious. Temples piled on the site of older temples; palaces where half-forgotten kings usurped the thrones of conquerors who came from God knows where to conquer older kings; roads built on the bones of conquered armies; houses and palaces and subterranean passages that no man living knows the end of and few even the beginning. Dark corridors and colonnades and hollow walls; roofs that have ears and peep-holes; floors that are undermined by secret stairs; trees that have swayed with the weight of rotting human skulls and have shimmered with the silken bannerets of emperors. Such is Hanadra, half-ruined, and surrounded by a wall that was age-old in the dawn of written history.

Even its environs are mysterious; outside the walls, there are carven, gloomy palaces that once reëchoed to the tinkle of stringed instruments and the love-songs of some sultan's favorite—now fallen into ruins, or rebuilt to stable horses or shelter guns and stores and men; but eloquent in all their new-smeared whitewash, or in crumbling decay, of long-since-dead intrigue. No places, those, for strong men to live alone in, where night-breezes whisper through forgotten passages and dry teak planking recreaks to the memory of dead men's footsteps.

But strong men are not the only makings of an Empire, nor yet the only sufferers. Wherever the flag of England flies above a distant outpost or droops in the stagnant moisture of an Eastern swamp, there are the graves of England's women. The bones that quarreling jackals crunch among the tombstones—the peace along the clean-kept border-line—the pride of race and conquest and the cleaner pride of work well done, these are not man's only. Man does the work, but he is held to it and cheered on by the girl who loves him.

And so, above a stone-flagged courtyard, in a room that once had echoed to the laughter of a sultan's favorite, it happened that an English girl of twenty-one was pacing back and forth. Through the open curtained window she had seen her husband lead his command out through the echoing archway to the plain beyond; she had heard his boyish voice bark out the command and had listened to the rumble of the gun-wheels dying in the distance—for the last time possibly. She knew, as many an English girl has known, that she was alone, one white woman amid a swarm of sullen Aryans, and that she must follow along the road the guns had taken, served and protected by nothing more than low-caste natives.

And yet she was dry-eyed, and her chin was high; for they are a strange breed, these Anglo-Saxon women who follow the men they love to the lonely danger-zone. Ruth Bellairs could have felt no joy in her position; she had heard her husband growling his complaint at being forced to leave

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her, and she guessed what her danger was. Fear must have shrunk her heart-beats and loneliness have tried her courage. But there was an ayah in the room with her, a low-caste woman of the conquered race; and pride of country came to her assistance. She was firm-lipped and, to outward seeming, brave as she was beautiful.

EVEN when the door resounded twice to the sharp blow of a saber-hilt, and the ayah's pock-marked ebony took on a shade of gray, she stood like a queen with an army at her back and neither blanched nor trembled.

"Who is that, ayah?" she demanded.

The ayah shrank into herself and showed the whites of her eyes and grinned, as a pariah dog might show its teeth—afraid, but scenting carrion.

"Go and see!"

The ayah shuddered and collapsed, babbling incoherencies and calling on a horde of long-neglected gods to witness she was innocent. She clutched strangely at her breast and used only one hand to drag her shawl around her face. While she babbled she glanced wild-eyed around the long, low-ceilinged room. Ruth Bellairs looked down at her pityingly and went to the door herself and opened it.

"Salaam, memsahib!" boomed a deep voice from the darkness.

Ruth Bellairs started and the ayah screamed.

"Who are you? Enter—let me see you!"

A black beard and a turban and the figure of a man—and then white teeth and a saber-hilt and eyes that gleamed moved forward from the darkness.

"It is I, Mahommed Khan!" boomed the voice again, and the Risaldar stepped out into the lamplight and closed the door behind him. Then, with a courtly, old-world, long-discarded sweep of his right arm, he saluted.

"At the heavenborn's service!"

"Mahommed Khan! Thank God!"

The old man's shabbiness was very obvious as he faced her, with his back against the iron-studded door; but he stood erect as a man of thirty, and his medals and his sword-hilt and his silver scabbard-tip were bright.

"Tell me, Mahommed Khan, you have seen my husband?"

He bowed.

"You have spoken to him?"

The old man bowed again.

"He left you in my keeping, heavenborn. I am to bring you safe to Jundhra!"

She held her hand out and he took it like a cavalier, bending until he could touch her fingers with his lips.

"What is the meaning of this hurrying of the guns to Jundhra, Risaldar?"

"Who knows, memsahib! The orders of the Sirkar come, and we of the service must obey. I am thy servant and the Sirkar's!"

"You, old friend—that were servant, as you choose to call it, to my husband's father! I am a proud woman to have such friends at call!" She pointed to the ayah, recovering sulkily and rearranging the shawl about her shoulders. "That I call service, Risaldar. She cowers when a knock comes at the door! I need you, and you answer a hardly spoken prayer; what is friendship, if yours is not?"

The Risaldar bowed low again.

"I would speak with that ayah, heavenborn!" he muttered, almost into his beard. She could hardly catch the words.

"I can't get her to speak to me at all tonight, Mahommed Khan. She's terrified almost out of her life at something. But perhaps you can do better. Try. Do you want to question her alone?"

"By the heavenborn's favor, yes."

RUTH walked down the room toward the window, drew the curtain back and leaned her head out where whatever breeze there was might fan her cheek. The Risaldar strode over to where the ayah cowered by an inner doorway.

"She-Hindu-dog!" he growled at her. "Mother of whelps! Louse-ridden scavenger of sweepings! What part hast thou in all this treachery? Speak!"

The ayah shrank away from him and tried to scream, but he gripped her by the throat and shook her.

"Speak!" he growled again.

But his ten iron fingers held her in a vise-like grip and she could not have answered him if she had tried to.

"O Risaldar!" called Ruth suddenly, with her head still out of the window. He released the ayah and let her tumble as she pleased into a heap.

"Heavenborn?"

"What is that red glow on the sky-line over yonder?"

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"A burning, heavenborn!"

"A burning? What burning? Funeral-pyres? It's very big for funeral-pyres!"

"Nay, heavenborn!"

"What, then?"

She was still unfrightened, unsuspicious of the untoward.

The Risaldar's arrival on the scene had quite restored her confidence and she felt content to ride with him to Jundhra on the morrow.

"Barracks, heavenborn!"

"Barracks? What barracks?"

"There is but one barracks between here and Jundhra."

"Then—then—then—what has happened, Mahommed Khan?"

"The worst has happened, heavenborn!"

He stood between her and the ayah, so that she could not see the woman huddled on the floor.

"The worst? You mean then—my—my husband—you don't mean that my husband——"

"I mean, heavenborn, that there is insurrection! All India is ablaze from end to end. These dogs here in Hanadra wait to rise because they think the section will return here in an hour or two; then they propose to burn it, men, guns and horses, like snakes in the Summer grass. It is well that the section will not return! We will ride out safely before morning!"

"And, my husband—he knew—all this—before he left me here?"

"Nay! That he did not! Had I told him, he had disobeyed his orders and shamed his service; he is young yet, and a hothead! He will be far along the road to Jundhra before he knows what burns. And then he will remember that he trusts me and obey orders and press on!"

"And you knew and did not tell him!"

"Of a truth I knew!"

She stood in silence for a moment, gazing at the red glow on the sky-line, and then turned to read, if she could, what was on the grim, grizzled face of Mahommed Khan.

"The ayah!" he growled. "I have yet to ask questions of the ayah. Have I permission to take her to the other room?"

She was leaning through the window again and did not answer him.

"Who's that moving in the shadow down below?" she asked him suddenly.

He leaned out beside her and gazed into the shadow. Then he called softly in a tongue she did not know and some one rose up from the shadow and answered him.

"Are we spied on, Risaldar?"

"Nay. Guarded, heavenborn! That man is my half-brother. May I take the ayah through that doorway?"

"Why not question her in here?"

The mystery and sense of danger were getting the better of her; she was thoroughly afraid now—afraid to be left alone in the room for a minute even.

"There are things she would not answer in thy presence!"

"Very well. Only, please be quick!"

HE BOWED. Swinging the door open, he pushed the ayah through it to the room beyond. Ruth was left alone, to watch the red glow on the sky-line and try to see the outline of the watcher in the gloom below. No sound came through the heavy teak door that the Risaldar had slammed behind him, and no sound came from him who watched; but from the silence of the night outside and from dark corners of the room that she was in and from the roof and walls and floor there came little eerie noises that made her flesh creep, as though she were being stared at by eyes she could not see. She felt that she must scream, or die, unless she moved; and she was too afraid to move, and by far too proud to scream! At last she tore herself away from the window and ran to a low divan and lay on it, smothering her face among the cushions. It seemed an hour before the Risaldar came out again, and then he took her by surprise.

"Heavenborn!" he said. She looked up with a start, to find him standing close beside her.

"Mahommed Khan! You're panting! What ails you?"

"The heat, heavenborn—and I am old."

His left hand was on his saber-hilt, thrusting it toward her respectfully; she noticed that it trembled.

"Have I the heavenborn's leave to lock the ayah in that inner room?"

"Why, Risaldar?"

"The fiend had this in her possession!" He showed her a thin-bladed dagger with an ivory handle; his own hand shook as he held it out to her, and she saw that there were beads of perspiration on his wrist. "She would have killed thee!"

"Oh, nonsense! Why, she wouldn't dare!"

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"She confessed before she—she confessed! Have I the heavenborn's leave?"

"If you wish it."

"And to keep the key?"

"I suppose so, if you think it wise."

He strode to the inner door and locked it and hid the key in an inside pocket of his tunic.

"And now, heavenborn," he said, "I crave your leave to bring my half-brother to the presence!"

He scarcely waited for an answer, but walked to the window, leaned out of it and whistled. A minute later he was answered by the sound of finger-nails scrabbling on the outer door. He turned the key and opened it.

"Enter!" he ordered.

Barefooted and ragged, but as clean as a soldier on parade and with huge knots of muscles bulging underneath his copper skin, a Rajput entered, bowing his six feet of splendid manhood almost to the floor.

"This, heavenborn, is my half-brother, son of a low-born border-woman, whom my father chose to honor thus far! The dog is loyal!"

"Salaam!" said Ruth, with little interest.

"Salaam, memsahib!" muttered the shabby Rajput.

"Does any watch?" demanded the Risaldar in Hindustanee.

"Aye, one!"

"And he?"

"Is he of whom I spoke."

"Where watches he?"

"There is a hidden passage leading from the archway; he peeps out through a crack, having rolled back so far the stone that seals it." He held his horny fingers about an inch apart to show the distance.

"Couldst thou approach unseen?"

The Rajput nodded.

"And there are no others there?"

"No others."

"Has thy strength left thee, or thy cunning?"

"Nay!"

"Then bring him!"

WITHOUT a word in answer the giant turned and went, and the Risaldar made fast the door behind him. Ruth sat with her face between her hands, trying not to cry or shudder, but obsessed and overpowered by a sense of terror. The mystery that surrounded her was bad enough; but this mysterious ordering and coming to and fro among her friends was worse than horrible. She knew, though, that it would be useless to question Mahommed Khan before he chose to speak. They waited there in the dimly lighted room for what seemed like an age again; she, pale and tortured by weird imaginings; he, grim and bolt-upright like a statue of a warrior. Then sounds came from the stairs again, and the Risaldar hurried to the door and opened it.

In burst the Risaldar's half-brother, breathing heavily and bearing a load nearly as big as he was.

"The pig caught my wrist within the opening!" he growled, tossing his gagged and pinioned burden on the floor. "See where he all but broke it!"

"What is thy wrist to the service of the Raj? Is he the right one?"

"Aye!" He stooped and tore a twisted loin-cloth from his victim's face, and the Risaldar walked to the lamp and brought it, to hold it above the prostrate form. Ruth left her divan and stood between the men, terrified by she knew not what fear, but drawn into the lamplight by insuperable curiosity.

"This, heavenborn," said the Risaldar, prodding at the man with his scabbard-point, "is none other than the High Priest of Kharvani's temple here, the arch-ringleader in all the treachery afoot—now hostage for thy safety!"

He turned to his half-brother. "Unbind the thing he lies with!" he commanded, and the giant unwrapped a twisted piece of linen from the High Priest's mouth.

"So the big fox peeped through the trap-door, because he feared to trust the other foxes; and the big fox fell into the trap!" grinned the Risaldar. "Bring me that table over yonder, thou!"

The half-brother did as he was told.

"Lay it here, legs upward, on the floor.

"Now, bind him to it—an arm to a leg and a leg to a leg.

"Remove his shoes.

"Put charcoal in yon brazier. Light it. Bring it hither!"

He seized a brass tongs, chose a glowing coal and held it six inches from the High Priest's naked foot.

Ruth screamed.

"Courage, heavenborn! Have courage! This is naught to what he would have done

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to thee! . . . . Now, speak, thou priest of infidels! What plans are laid and who will rise and when?"

CHAPTER III

A RIDER OF THE DARKNESS

"SERGEANT!"

"Sir!"

The close-cropped, pipe-clayed non-commissioned officer spurred his horse into a canter until his scabbard clattered at young Bellairs's boot. Nothing but the rattling and the jolting of the guns and ammunition-wagon was audible, except just on ahead of them the click-clack, click-click-clack of the advance-guard. To the right and left of them the shadowy forms of giant banian-trees loomed and slid past them as they had done for the past four hours, and for ten paces ahead they could see the faintly outlined shape of the trunk-road that they followed. The rest was silence and a pall of blackness obscuring everything. They had ridden along a valley, but they had emerged on rising ground and there was one spot of color in the pall now, or else a hole in it.

"What d'you suppose that is burning over there?"

"I couldn't say, sir."

"How far away is it?"

"Very hard to tell on a night like this, sir. It might be ten miles away and might be twenty. By my reckoning it's on our road, though, and somewhere between here and Jundhra."

"So it seems to me; our road swings round to the right presently, doesn't it? That'll lead us right to it. That would make it Doonha more or less. D'you suppose it's at Doonha?"

"I was thinking it might be, sir. If it's Doonha, it means that the sepoy barracks and all the stores are burning—there's nothing else there that would make all that flare!"

"There are two companies of the Thirty-third there, too."

"Yes, sir, but they're under canvas; tents would blaze up, but they'd die down again in a minute. That fire's steady and growing bigger!"

"It's the sepoy barracks, then!"

"Seems so to me, sir!"

"Halt!" roared Bellairs. The advance-guard kicked up a little shower of sparks, trace-chains slacked with a jingle and the jolting ceased. Bellairs rode up to the advance-guard.

"Now, sergeant," he ordered, "it looks as though that were the Doonha barracks burning over yonder. There's no knowing, though, what it is. Send four men on, two hundred yards ahead of you, and you and the rest keep a good two hundred yards ahead of the guns. See that the men keep on the alert, and mind that they spare their horses as much as possible. If there's going to be trouble, we may just as well be ready for it!"

"Very good, sir!"

"Go ahead, then!"

At a word from the sergeant, four men clattered off and were swallowed in the darkness. A minute later the advance-guard followed them and then, after another minute's pause, young Bellairs's voice was raised into a ringing shout again:

"Section, advance! Trot, march!"

THE trace-chains tightened, and the clattering, bumping, jingling procession began again, its rear brought up by the six-horse ammunition-wagon. They rode speechless for the best part of an hour, each man's eyes on the distant conflagration that had begun now to light up the whole of the sky ahead of them. They still rode in darkness, but they seemed to be approaching the red rim of the Pit. Huge, billowing clouds of smoke, red-lit on the under side, belched upward to the blackness overhead, and a something that was scarcely sound—for it was yet too distant—warned them that it was no illusion they were riding into. The conflagration grew. It seemed to be nearly white-hot down below.

Bellairs wet his finger and held it extended upward.

"There's no wind that I can feel!" he muttered. "And yet, if that were a grass-fire, there'd be game and rats and birds and things—some of 'em would bolt this way. That's the Doonha barracks burning, or I'm a black man, which the Lord forbid!"

A minute later, every man in the section pricked up his ears. There was no order given; but a sensation ran the whole length of it and a movement from easy riding to tense rigidity that could be felt by some sixth sense. Every man was listening, feeling, groping with his senses for something he

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could neither hear as yet nor see, but that he knew was there. And then, far-distant yet—not above, but under the jolting of the gun-wheels and the rattle of the scabbards—they could hear the clickety-clickety-clickety-click of a horse hard-ridden.

They had scarcely caught that sound, they had barely tightened up their bridle-reins, when another sound, one just as unmistakable, burst out in front of them. A ragged, ill-timed volley ripped out from somewhere near the conflagration and was answered instantly by one that was close-ripped like the fire of heavy ordnance. And then one of the advance-guard wheeled his horse and drove his spurs home rowel-deep. He came thundering back along the road with his scabbard out in the wind behind him and reined up suddenly when his horse's fore-feet were abreast of the lieutenant.

"There's some one coming, sir, hard as he can gallop! He's one of our men by the sound of him. His horse is shod—and I thought I saw steel when the fire-light fell on him a minute ago!"

"Are you sure there's only one?"

"Sure, sir! You can hear him now!"

"All right! Fall in behind me!"

Bellairs felt his sword-hilt and cocked a pistol stealthily, but he gave no orders to the section. This might be a native soldier run amuck, and it might be a messenger; but in either case, friend or foe, if there was only one man he could deal with him alone.

"Halt!" roared the advance-guard suddenly. But the horse's hoof-beats never checked for a single instant.

"Halt, —— you! Who comes there?"

"Friend!" came the answer, in an accent that was unmistakable.

"What friend? Where are you going?"

One of the advance-guard reined his horse across the road. The others followed suit and blocked the way effectually.

"Halt!" they roared in unison.

The main body of the advance came up with them.

"Who is he?" shouted the sergeant.

"We'll soon see! Here he comes!"

"OUT of my way!" yelled a voice, as a foam-flecked horse burst out of the darkness like an apparition and bore straight down on them—his head bored a little to one side, the red rims of his nostrils wide distended and his whole sense and energy and strength concentrated on pleasing the speed-hungry Irishman who rode him. He flashed into them head-on, like a devil from the outer darkness. His head touched a man's knee—and he rose and tried to jump him! His breast crashed full into the obstruction and horse and gunner crashed down to the road.

A dozen arms reached out—twelve horses surged in a clattering mêlée—two hands gripped the reins and four arms seized the rider, and in a second the panting charger was brought up all-standing. The sergeant thrust his grim face closer and peered at their capture.

"Good ——, if it ain't an officer!" he exclaimed. "I beg your pardon, sir!"

And at that instant the section rattled up behind them, with Bellairs in the lead.

"Halt!" roared Bellairs. "What's this?"

"Bloody murder, arson, high treason, mutiny and death! Blood and onions, man! Don't your men know an officer when they see one? Who are you? Are you Bellairs? Then why in God's name didn't you say so sooner? What have you waited for? How many hours is it since you got the message through from Jundhra? Couldn't you see the barracks burning? Who am I—I'm Captain O'Rourke, of the Thirty-third, sent to see what you're doing on the road, that's who I am! A full-fledged, able-bodied Captain wasted in a crisis, just because you didn't choose to hurry! Poison take your confounded gunners, sir! Have they nothing better to engage them than holding up officers on the Queen's trunk-road?"

"Supposing you tell me what's the matter?" suggested young Bellairs, prompt as are most of his breed to appear casual the moment there was cause to feel excited.

"Your —— gunners have taken all my breath, sir. I can't speak!"

"You shouldn't take chances with a section of artillery! They're not like infantry—they don't sleep *all* the time—you can't ride through them as a rule!"

"Don't sleep, don't they! Then what have you been doing on the road? And what are you standing here for? Ride, man, ride! You're wanted!"

"Get out of the way, then!" suggested Bellairs, and Captain O'Rourke legged his panting charger over to the roadside.

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"Advance-guard, forward, trot!" commanded the lieutenant.

"Have you brought your wife with you?" demanded O'Rourke, peering into the jingling blackness.

"No. Of course not. Why?"

"'Of course not! Why?' says the man! Hell and hot porridge! Why, the whole of India's ablaze from end to end—the sepoys have mutinied to a man, and the rest have joined them! There's bloody murder doing—they've shot their officers—Hammond's dead and Carstairs and Welfleet and heaven knows who else. They've burned their barracks and the stores and they're trying to seize the magazine. If they get that, God help every one. They're short of ammunition as it is, but two companies of the Thirty-third can't hold out for long against that horde. You'll be in the nick of time! Hurry, man! For the love of anything you like to name, get a move on!"

CHAPTER IV

THE GUNS—THE GUNS!

"TROT, march!

"Canter!"

Bellairs was thinking of his wife, alone in Hanadra, unprotected except by a sixty-year-old Risaldar and a half-brother who was a civilian and an unknown quantity. There were cold chills running down his spine and a sickening sensation in his stomach. He rode ahead of the guns, with O'Rourke keeping pace beside him. He felt that he hated O'Rourke, hated everything, hated the Service, and the country—and the guns, that could put him into such a fiendish predicament.

O'Rourke broke silence first.

"Who is with your wife?" he demanded suddenly.

"Heaven knows! I left her under the protection of Risaldar Mahommed Khan, but he was to ride off for an escort for her."

"Not your father's old Risaldar?" asked O'Rourke.

"The same."

"Then thank God! I'd sooner trust him than I would a regiment. He'll bring her in alive or slit the throats of half Asia—maybe he'll do both! Come, that's off our minds! She's safer with him than she would be here. Have you lots of ammunition?"

"I brought all I had with me at Hanadra."

"Good! What you'll need to-night is grape!"

"I've lots of it. It's nearly all grape."

"Hurrah! Then we'll treat those dirty mutineers to a dose or two of pills they won't fancy! Come on, man—set the pace a little faster!"

"Why didn't my orders say anything about a mutiny or bringing in my wife?"

"Dunno! I didn't write 'em. I can guess, though. There'd be something like nine reasons. For one thing, they'd credit you with sense enough to bring her in without being told. For another, the messenger who took the note might have got captured on the way—they wouldn't want to tell the sepoys more than they could help. Then there'd be something like a hurry. They're attacked there too—can't even send us assistance. Told us to waylay you and make use of you. Maybe they forgot your wife—maybe they didn't. It's a devil of a business anyhow!"

IT was difficult to talk at the speed that they were making, with their own horses breathing heavily, O'Rourke's especially; the guns thundering along behind them and the advance-guard clattering in front, and their attention distracted every other minute by the noise of volleys on ahead and the occasional staccato rattle of independent firing. The whole sky was now alight with the reflection of the burning barracks and they could see the ragged outlines of the cracking walls silhouetted against the blazing red within. One mile or less from the burning buildings they could see, too, the occasional flash of rifles where the two companies of the Thirty-third, Honorable East India Company's Light Infantry, held out against the mutineers.

"Why did they mutiny?" asked Bellairs.

"God knows! Nobody knows! Nobody knows anything! I'm thinking——"

"Thinking *what?*"

"Forrester-Carter is commanding. We'll settle this business pretty quickly, now you've come. Then—— Steady, boy! Steady! Hold up! This poor horse of mine is just about foundered, by the feel of him. He'll reach Doonha, though. Then we'll ask Carter to make a dash on Hanadra and bring Mrs. Bellairs—maybe we'll meet her

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and the Risaldar half-way—who knows? The sepoys wouldn't expect that, either. The move 'd puzzle 'em—it 'd be a good move, to my way of thinking."

"Let's hope Carter will consent!" prayed Bellairs fervently. "Now, what's the lay of things?"

"Couldn't tell you! When I left, our men were surrounded. I had to burst through the enemy to get away. Ours are all round the magazine and the sepoys are on every side of them. You'll have to use diagonal fire unless you want to hurt some of our chaps—sweep 'em cornerwise. There's high ground over to the right there, within four hundred yards of the position. Maybe they're holding it, though—there's no knowing!"

They could hear the roar of the flames now, and could see the figures of sepoys running here and there. The rattle of musketry was incessant. They could hear howls and yells and bugle-calls blown at random by the sepoys, and once, in answer as it seemed to a more than usually savage chorus from the enemy—a chorus that was punctuated by a raging din of intermittent rifle-fire—a ringing cheer.

"They must be in a tight hole!" muttered Bellairs. "Answer that, men! All together, now! Let 'em know we're coming!"

THE men rose in their stirrups all together, and sent roaring through the blackness the deep-throated "Hip-hip-hur-r-a-a-a-a-a!" that has gladdened more than one beleaguered British force in the course of history. It is quite different from the "Hurr-o-a-o-a-u-r-rh" of a forlorn hope, or the high-pitched note of pleasure that signals the end of a review. It means "Hold on till we get there, boys!" and it carries its meaning, clear and crisp and unmistakable, in its note.

The two beleaguered companies heard it and answered promptly with another cheer.

"By Gad, they must be in a hole!" remarked Bellairs.

British soldiers do not cheer like that, all together, unless there is very good reason to feel cheerless. They fight, each man according to his temperament, swearing or laughing, sobbing or singing comic songs, until the case looks grim. Then, though, the same thrill runs through the whole of them, the same fire blazes in their eyes, and the last ditch that they line has been known to be a grave for the enemy.

"Trumpeter! Sound close-order!"

The trumpet rang. The advance-guard drew rein for the section to catch up. The guns drew abreast of one another and the mounted gunners formed in a line, two deep, in front of them. The ammunition-wagon trailed like a tail behind.

"That high ground over there, I think!" suggested O'Rourke.

"Thank you, sir. Section, right! Trot, march! Canter!"

Crash went the guns and the following wagon across the road-side ditch. The tired horses came up to the collar as service-horses always will, generous to the last ounce of strength they have in them.

"Gallop!"

The limbers bumped and jolted and the short-handled whips cracked like the sound of pistol-practise. Blind, unreconnoitered, grim—like a black thunderbolt loosed into the blackness—the two guns shot along a hollow, thundered up a ridge and burst into the fire-light up above the mutineers, in the last place where any one expected them. A howl came from the road that they had left, a hundred sepoys had rushed down to block their passage the moment that their cheer had rung above the noise of battle.

"Action—front!" roared young Bellairs, and the muzzles swung round at the gallop, jerked into position by the wheeling teams.

"With case, at four hundred!"

The orders were given and obeyed almost before the guns had lost their motion. The charges had been rammed into the greedy muzzles before the horses were away, almost—and that takes but a second—the horses vanish like blown smoke when the game begins. A howl from the mutineers told that they were seen; a volley from the British infantry announced that they were yet in time; and "boom—boom!" went both guns together.

The grapeshot whined and shrieked, and the ranks of the sepoys wilted, mown down as though a scythe had swept them. Once, and once only, they gathered for a charge on the two guns; but they were met half-way up the rise by a shrieking blast of grape that ripped through them and took the heart out of them; and the grape was followed by well-aimed volleys from behind. Then they drew off to sulk and make fresh plans at a distance, and Bellairs took his section

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unmolested into the Thirty-third-lined rampart round the magazine.

"WHAT kept you, sir?" demanded Colonel Forrester-Carter, nodding to him in answer to his salute and holding out his right arm while a sergeant bandaged it.

"My wife, sir—I——"

"Where is she? Didn't you bring her?"

"No, sir—I——"

"Where is she?"

"Still at Hanadra, sir—I——"

"Let the men fall in! Call the roll at once!"

"There was nothing in my orders, sir, about——"

But Colonel Carter cut him short with a motion and turned his back on him.

"Much obliged, sergeant," he said, slipping his wounded arm into an improvised sling. "How many wagons have we here?"

"Four, sir."

"And horses?"

"All shot dead except your charger, sir."

"Oh! Ask Captain Trevor to come here."

The sergeant disappeared into the shadows, and a moment later Captain Trevor came running up and saluted.

"There are seven wounded, sir, and nineteen dead," he reported.

"Better than I had hoped, Trevor! Will you set a train to that magazine, please, and blow it up the moment we are at a safe distance?"

Trevor seemed surprised, but he saluted and said nothing.

"O'Rourke! Please see about burying the dead at once. Mr. Bellairs, let me have two horses, please, and their drivers, from each gun. Sergeant! See about putting the wounded into the lightest of the wagons and harness in four gun-horses the best way you can manage."

"Very good, sir."

"Which is your best horseman, Mr. Bellairs? Is his horse comparatively fresh? I'll need him to gallop with a message. I'll dictate it to Captain O'Rourke as soon as he is ready. Let the gunner stay here close to me."

Bellairs sought out his best man and the freshest-seeming horse in wondering silence. He felt sick with anxiety, for what could one lone veteran Risaldar do to protect Mrs. Bellairs against such a horde as was in Hanadra? He looked at the barracks, which were still blazing heavenward and illuminating the whole countryside, and shuddered as he wondered whether his quarters at Hanadra were in flames yet.

"It's a good job old Carter happened to be here!" he heard one of his men mumble to another. "He's a man, that is—I'd sooner fight under him than any I know of!"

"What d' you suppose the next move is?" asked the other man.

"I'd bet on it! I'll bet you what you like that——"

But Bellairs did not hear the rest.

A bugle rang out into the night. The gunners stood by their horses. Even the sentries, posted outside the rampart to guard against alarm, stood to attention, and Colonel Carter, wincing from the pain in his right arm, walked out in front of where the men were lined up.

Captain O'Rourke walked up and saluted him.

"I've arranged to bury them in that trench we dug this evening, sir, when the trouble started. It's not very deep, but it holds them all. I've laid them in it."

"Are you sure they're all dead?"

"I've burnt their fingers with matches, sir. I don't know of any better way to make sure."

"Very well. Can you remember any of the burial service?"

"'Fraid not, sir."

"Um! That's a pity. And I'm afraid I can't spare the time. Take a firing-party, Captain O'Rourke, and give them the last honors, at all events."

A party marched away toward the trench, and several minutes later O'Rourke's voice was heard calling through the darkness, "All ready, sir!"

"Present arms!" ordered the Colonel, and the gunners sat their horses with their hilts raised to their hips and the two long lines of infantry stood rigid at the general salute, while five volleys—bulleted—barked upward above the grave. They were answered by sniping from the mutineers, who imagined that reprisals had commenced.

"NOW men!" said Colonel Carter, raising his voice until every officer and man along the line could hear him, "as you must have realized, things are very serious indeed. We are cut off from support, but now that the guns are here to help us, we could either hold out here until

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relieved or else fight our way into Jundhra, where I have no doubt we are very badly needed. But"—he spoke more slowly and distinctly now, with a distinct pause between each word—"there is an officer's lady alone, and practically unprotected at Hanadra. Our duty is clear. You are tired—I know it. You have had no supper, and will get none. It means forced marching for the rest of this night and a good part of tomorrow and more fighting, possibly on an empty stomach; it means the dust and the heat and the discomfort of the trunk-road for all of us and danger of the worst kind instead of safety—for we shall have farther to go to reach Jundhra. But I would do the same, and you men all know it, for any soldier's wife in my command, or any English woman in India. We will march now on Hanadra. No! No demonstration, please!"

His uplifted left hand was just in time to check a roar of answering approval.

"Didn't I tell you so?" exclaimed a gunner to the man beside him in an undertone. "Him leave a white woman to face this sort o' music? He'd fight all India first!"

Ten minutes later two companies of men marched out behind the guns, followed by a cart that bore their wounded. As they reached the trunk-road they were saluted by a reverberating blast when the magazine that they had fought to hold blew skyward. They turned to cheer the explosion and then settled down to march in deadly earnest and, if need be, to fight a rear-guard action all the way.

And in the opposite direction one solitary gunner rode, hell-bent-for-leather, with a note addressed to "O. C.—Jundhra." It was short and to the point. It ran:

Have blown up magazine; Mrs. Bellairs at Hanadra; have gone to rescue her.
(Signed) A. Forrester-Carter (Col.)
per J. O'Rourke

CHAPTER V

CERTAIN TIME-HONORED METHODS OF THE EAST RECEIVE A CHECK

THE red glow of barracks burning—an ayah from whom a dagger has been taken locked in another room—the knowledge that there are fifty thousand Aryan brothers, itching to rebel, within a stone's throw—and two lone protectors of an alien race intent on torturing a High Priest, each and every one of these is a disturbing feature. No woman, and least of all a young woman such as Ruth Bellairs, can be blamed for being nervous under the stress of such conditions or for displaying a certain amount of feminine unreasonableness.

She stood shivering for a minute and watched spell-bound while Mahommed Khan held the hot coal closer and ever closer to the High Priest's naked foot. The priest writhed in anticipation of the agony and turned his eyes away, and as he turned them they met Ruth's. High priests of a religion that includes soothsaying and prophecy and bribery of gods among its rites are students of human nature, and especially of female human nature. A knowledge of it and of how it may be gulled, and when, is the first essential of their calling. Her pale face, her blue eyes strained in terror, the parted lips and the attitude of tension, these gave him an idea. Before the charcoal touched him, he screamed—screamed like a wounded horse.

"Mahommed Khan, stop! Stop this instant! I won't have it! I won't have my life, even, on those terms! D' you hear me, sir!"

"Have courage, heavenborn! There is but one way to force a Hindu priest, unless it be by cutting off his revenues—he must be hurt! This dog is unhurt as yet—see! The fire has not yet touched his foot!"

"Don't let it, Mahommed Khan! Set that iron down! This is my room. I will not have crime committed here!"

"And how long does the heavenborn think it would be her room were this evil-living pig of a priest at large, or how long before a worse crime were committed? Heavenborn, the hour is late and the charcoal dies out rapidly when it has left the fire! See. I must choose another piece!"

He rummaged in the brazier, and she screamed again.

"I will not have it, Risaldar! You must find another way."

"Memsahib! Thy husband left thee in my care. Surely it is my right to choose the way?"

"Leave me, then! I relieve you of your trust. I will not have him tortured in my room, or anywhere!"

Mahommed Khan bowed low.

"Under favor, heavenborn," he answered, "my trust is to your husband. I can be

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released by him, or by death, not otherwise."

"Once, and for all, Mahommed Khan, I will not have you torture him in here!"

"Memsahib, I have yet to ride for succor! At daybreak, when these Hindus learn that the guns will not come back, they will rise to a man. Even now we must find a hiding-place or—it is not good even to think what I might find on my return!"

He leaned over the priest again, but without the charcoal this time.

"Speak, thou!" he ordered, growling in Hindustanee through his savage black mustache. "I have yet to hear what price a Hindu sets on immunity from torture!"

But the priest, it seemed, had formed a new idea. He had been looking through puckered eyes at Ruth, keen, cool calculation in his glance, and in spite of the discomfort of his strained position he contrived to nod.

"Kharvani!" he muttered, half aloud.

"Aye! Call on Kharvani!" sneered the Risaldar. "Perhaps the Bride of Siva will appear! Call louder!"

He stirred again among the charcoal with his tongs, and Ruth and the High Priest both shuddered.

"Look!" said the High Priest in Hindustanee, nodding in Ruth's direction. It was the first word that he had addressed to them. It took them by surprise, and the Risaldar and his half-brother turned and looked. Their breath left them.

FRAMED in the yellow lamplight, her thin, hot-weather garments draped about her like a morning mist, Ruth stood and stared straight back at them through frightened eyes. Her blue-black hair, which had become loosened in her excitement, hung in a long plait over one shoulder and gleamed in the lamp's reflection. Her skin took on a faintly golden color from the feeble light, and her face seemed stamped with fear, anxiety, pity and suffering, all at once, that strangely enhanced her beauty. Silhouetted as she was against the blackness of the wall behind, she seemed to be standing in an aura, shimmering with radiated light.

"Kharvani!" said the High Priest to himself again, and the two Rajputs stood still like men dumbfounded, and stared and stared and stared. They knew Kharvani's temple. Who was there in Hanadra, Christian or Mohammedan or Hindu, who did not? The show-building of the city, the ancient, gloomy, wonderful erection where bats lived in the dome and flitted round Kharvani's image, the place where every one must go who needed favors of the priests, the central hub of treason and intrigue, where every plot was hatched and every rumor had its origin—the ultimate, mazy, greedy, undisgorging goal of every bribe and every blackmail-wrung rupee!

They knew, too, as every one must know who has ever been inside the place, the amazing, awe-inspiring picture of Kharvani painted on the inner wall; of Kharvani as she was idealized in the days when priests believed in her and artists thought the labor of a lifetime well employed in painting but one picture of her—Kharvani the sorrowful, grieving for the wickedness of earth; Kharvani, Bride of Siva, ready to intercede with Siva, the Destroyer, for the helpless, foolish, purblind sons of man.

And here, before them, stood Kharvani—to the life!

"What of Kharvani?" growled Mahommed Khan.

"'A purblind fool, a sot and a Mohammedan,'" quoted the priest maliciously, "'how many be they, three or one?'"

The Risaldar's hand went to his scabbard. His sword licked out free and trembled like a tuning-fork. He flicked with his thumb-nail at the blade and muttered: "Sharp! Sharp as death itself!"

The Hindu grinned, but the blade came down slowly until the point of it rested on the bridge of his nose. His eyes squinted inward, watching it.

"Now, make thy gentle joke again!" growled the Risaldar.

Ruth Bellairs checked a scream.

"No blood!" she exclaimed. "Don't hurt him, Risaldar! I'll not have you kill a man in here—or anywhere, in cold blood, for that matter! Return your sword, sir!"

The Risaldar swore into his beard. The High Priest grinned again. "I am not afraid to die!" he sneered. "Thrust with that toy of thine! Thrust home and make an end!"

"Memsahib!" said the Risaldar, "all this is foolishness and waste of time! The hour is past midnight and I must be going. Leave the room—leave me and my half-brother with this priest for five short minutes and we will coax from him the secret

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of some hiding-place where you may lie hid until I come!"

"But you'll hurt him!"

"Not if he speaks, and speaks the truth!"

"Promise me!"

"On those conditions—yes!"

"Where shall I go?"

The Risaldar's eyes glanced toward the door of the inner room, but he hesitated. "Nay! There is the ayah!" he muttered. "Is there no other room?"

"No, Risaldar, no other room except through that door. Besides, I would rather stay here! I am afraid of what you may do to that priest if I leave you alone with him!"

"Now a murrain on all women, black and white!" swore Mahommed Khan beneath his breath. Then he turned on the priest again, and placed one foot on his stomach.

"Speak!" he ordered. "What of Kharvani?"

"LISTEN, Mahommed Khan!" Ruth Bellairs laid one hand on his sleeve, and tried to draw hm back. "Your ways are not my ways! You are a soldier and a gentleman, but please remember that you are of a different race! I can not let my life be saved by the torture of a human being—no, not even of a Hindu priest! Maybe it's all right and honorable according to your ideas; but, if you did it, I would never be able to look my husband in the face again! No, Risaldar! Let this priest go, or leave him here—I don't care which, but don't harm him! I am quite ready to ride with you, now, if you like. I suppose you have horses? But I would rather die than think that a man was put to the torture to save me! Life isn't worth that price!"

She spoke rapidly, urging him with every argument she knew; but the grim old Mohammedan shook his head.

"Better die here," he answered her, "than on the road! No, memsahib. With thirteen blades behind me, I could reach Jundhra, or at least make a bold attempt; but single-handed, and with you to guard, the feat is impossible. This dog of a Hindu here knows of some hiding-place. Let him speak!"

His hand went to his sword again, and his eyes flashed.

"Listen, heavenborn! I am no torturer of priests by trade! It is not my life that I would save!"

"I know that, Mahommed Khan! I respect your motive. It's the method that I can't tolerate."

The Risaldar drew his arm away from her and began to pace the room. The High Priest instantly began to speak to Ruth, whispering to her hurriedly in Hindustanee, but she was too little acquainted with the language to understand him.

"And I," said the Risaldar's half-brother suddenly, "am I of no further use?"

"I had forgotten thee!" exclaimed the Risaldar.

They spoke together quickly in their own language, drawing aside and muttering to one another. It was plain that the half-brother was making some suggestion and that the Risaldar was questioning him and cross-examining him about his plan, but neither Ruth nor the High Priest could understand a word that either of them said. At the end of two minutes or more, the Risaldar gave an order of some kind and the half-brother grunted and left the room without another word, closing the door noiselessly behind him. The Risaldar locked it again from the inside and drew the bolt.

"We have made another plan, heavenborn!" he announced mysteriously.

"Then — then — you won't hurt this priest?"

"Not yet," said the Risaldar. "He may be useful!"

"Won't you unbind him, then? Look! His wrists and ankles are all swollen."

"Let the dog swell!" he grunted.

But Ruth stuck to her point and made him loosen the bonds a little.

"A man lives and learns!" swore the Risaldar. "Such as he were cast into dungeons in my day, to feed on their own bellies until they had had enough of life!"

"The times have changed!" said Ruth.

The Risaldar looked out through the window toward the red glow on the sky-line.

"Ha! Changed, have they!" he muttered. "I saw one such burning, once before!"

CHAPTER VI

STRIKE AND STRIKE HARD!

THE most wonderful thing in history, pointing with the surest finger to the trail of destiny, has been the fact that in every tremendous crisis there have been

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leaders on the spot to meet it. It is not so wonderful that there should be such men, for the world keeps growing better, and it is more than likely that the men who have left their footprints in the sands of time would compare to their own disadvantage with their compeers of to-day. The wonderful thing is that the right men have been in the right place at the right time. Scipio met Hannibal; Philip of Spain was forced to meet Howard of Effingham and Drake; Napoleon Bonaparte, the "Man of Destiny," found Wellington and Nelson of the Nile to deal with him; and, in America, men like George Washington and Grant and Lincoln seem, in the light of history, like timed, calculated, controlling devices in an intricate machine.

It was so when the Indian Mutiny broke out. The struggle was unexpected. A handful of Europeans, commissioned and enlisted in the ordinary way, with a view to trade, not statesmanship, found themselves face to face at a minute's notice with armed and vengeful millions. Succor was a question of months, not days or weeks. India was ablaze from end to end with rebel fires that had been planned in secret through silent watchful years. The British force was scattered here and there in unconnected details, and each detail was suddenly cut off from every other one by men who had been trained to fight by the British themselves and who were not afraid to die.

The suddenness with which the outbreak came was one of the chief assets of the rebels, for they were able to seize guns and military stores and ammunition at the very start of things, before the British force could concentrate. Their hour could scarcely have been better chosen. The Crimean War was barely over. Practically the whole of England's standing army was abroad and decimated by battle and disease. At home, politics had England by the throat; the income-tax was on a Napoleonic scale and men were more bent on worsting one another than on equipping armies. They had had enough of war.

India was isolated, at the rebels' mercy, so it seemed. There were no railway trains to make swift movements of troops possible. Distances were reckoned by the hundred miles—of sun-baked, thirsty dust in the hot weather, and of mud in the rainy season. There were no telegraph-wires, and the British had to cope with the mysterious, and even yet unsolved, native means of sending news—the so-called "underground route," by which news and instructions travel faster than a pigeon flies. There was never a greater certainty or a more one-sided struggle, at the start. The only question seemed to be how many days, or possibly weeks, would pass before jackals crunched the bones of every Englishman in India.

BUT at the British helm was Nicholson, and under him were a hundred other men whose courage and resource had been an unknown quantity until the outbreak came. Nicholson's was the guiding spirit, but it needed only his generalship to fire all the others with that grim enthusiasm that has pulled Great Britain out of so many other scrapes. Instead of wasting time in marching and countermarching to relieve the scattered posts, a swift, sudden swoop was made on Delhi, where the eggs of the rebellion had hatched.

As many of the outposts as could be reached were told to fight their own way in, and those that could not be reached were left to defend themselves until the big blow had been struck at the heart of things. If Delhi could be taken, the rebels would be paralyzed and the rescue of beleaguered details would be easier; so, although odds of one hundred or more to one are usually considered overlarge in wartime—when the hundred hold the fort and the one must storm the gate—there was no time lost in hesitation. Delhi was the goal; and from north and south and east and west the men who could march marched, and those who could not entrenched themselves and made ready to die in the last ditch.

Some of the natives were loyal still. There were men like Risaldar Mahommed Khan, who would have died ten deaths ten times over rather than be false in one particular to the British Government. It was these men who helped to make intercommunication possible, for they could carry messages and sometimes get through unsuspected where a British soldier would have been shot before he had ridden half a mile. Their loyalty was put to the utmost test in that hour, for they can not have believed that the British force could

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win. They knew the extent of what was out against them and knew, too, what their fate would be in the event of capture or defeat. There would be direr, slower vengeance wreaked on them than on the alien British. But they had eaten British salt and pledged their word, and nothing short of death could free them from it. There was not a shred of self-interest to actuate them; there could not have been. Their given word was law and there it ended.

There were isolated commands, like that at Jundhra, that were too far away to strike at Delhi and too large and too efficient to be shut in by the mutineers. They were centers on their own account of isolated small detachments, and each commander was given leave to act as he saw best, provided that he acted and did it quickly. He could either march to the relief of his detachments or call them in, but under no condition was he to sit still and do nothing.

SO, COLONEL CARTER'S note addressed to O. C.—Jundhra only got two-thirds of the way from Doonha. The gunner who rode with it was brought to a sudden standstill by an advance-guard of British cavalry, and two minutes later he found himself saluting and giving up his note to the General Commanding. The rebels at Jundhra had been worsted and scattered after an eight-hour fight, and General Turner had made up his mind instantly to sweep down on Hanadra with all his force and relieve the British garrison at Doonha on his way.

Jundhra was a small town and unhealthy. Hanadra was a large city, the center of a province; and, from all accounts, Hanadra had not risen yet. By seizing Hanadra before the mutineers had time to barricade themselves inside it, he could paralyze the countryside, for in Hanadra were the money and provisions and, above all, the Hindu priests who, in that part of India at least, were the brains of the rebellion. So he burned Jundhra, to make it useless to the rebels, and started for Hanadra with every man and horse and gun and wagon and round of ammunition that he had.

Now news in India travels like the wind, first one way and then another. But, unlike the wind, it never whistles. Things happen and men know it and the information spreads—invisible, intangible, inaudible, but positive and, in nine cases out of ten, correct in detail. A government can no more censor it, or divert it, or stop it on the way, than it can stay the birth-rate or tamper with the Great Monsoon.

First the priests knew it, then it filtered through the main bazaars and from them on through the smaller streets. By the time that General Turner had been two hours on the road with his command every man and woman and child in Hanadra knew that the rebels had been beaten back and that Hanadra was his objective. They knew, too, that the section had reached Doonha, had relieved it and started back again. And yet not a single rebel who had fought in either engagement was within twenty miles of Hanadra yet!

In the old, low-ceilinged room above the archway Mahommed Khan paced up and down and chewed at his black mustache, kicking his scabbard away from him each time he turned and glowering at the priest.

"That dog can solve this riddle!" he kept muttering. Then he would glare at Ruth impatiently and execrate the squeamishness of women. Ruth sat on the divan with her face between her hands, trying to force herself to realize the full extent of her predicament and beat back the feeling of hysteria that almost had her in its grip. The priest lay quiet. He was in a torture of discomfort on the upturned table, but he preferred not to give the Risaldar the satisfaction of knowing it. He eased his position quietly from time to time as much as his bandages would let him, but he made no complaint.

SUDDENLY, Ruth looked up. It had occurred to her that she was wasting time and that if she were to fight off the depression that had seized her she would be better occupied.

"Mahommed Khan," she said, "if I am to leave here on horseback, with you or with an escort, I had better collect some things that I would like to take with me. Let me in that room, please!"

"The horse will have all that it can carry, heavenborn, without a load of woman's trappings."

"My jewels? I can take them, I suppose?"

He bowed. "They are in there? I will bring them, heavenborn!"

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"Nonsense! You don't know where to find them."

"The ayah—will—will show me!"

He fitted the key into the lock and turned it, but Ruth was at his side before he could pass in through the door.

"Nonsense, Risaldar! The ayah can't hurt me. You have taken her knife away, and that is my room. I *will* go in there alone!"

She pushed past him before he could prevent her, thrust the door back and peered in.

"Stay, heavenborn—I will explain!"

"Explain what?"

The dim light from the lamp was filtering in past them, and her eyes were slowly growing accustomed to the gloom. There was something lying on the floor, in the middle of the room, that was bulky and shapeless and unfamiliar.

"Ayah!" said Ruth. "Ayah!"

But there was no answer.

"Where is she, Risaldar?"

"She is there, heavenborn!"

"Is she asleep?"

"Aye! She sleeps deeply!"

There was something in the Rajput's voice that was strange, that hinted at a darker meaning.

"Ayah!" she called again, afraid, though she knew not why, to enter.

"She guards the jewels, heavenborn! Wait, while I bring the lamp!"

He crossed the room, brought it and stepped with it past Ruth, straight into the room.

"See!" he said, holding the lamp up above his head. "There in her bosom are the jewels! It was there, too, that she had the knife to slay thee with! My sword is clean, yet, heavenborn! I slew her with my fingers, thus!"

He kicked the prostrate ayah and, as the black face with the wide-open blood-shot eyes and the protruding tongue rolled sideways and the body moved, a little heap of jewels fell upon the floor. Mahommed Khan stooped down to gather them, bending, a little painfully, on one old knee—but stopped half-way and turned. There was a thud behind him in the doorway. Ruth Bellairs had fainted, and lay as the ayah had lain when the Risaldar had not yet locked her in the room.

He raised the lamp and studied her in silence for a minute, looking from her to the bound priest and back to her again.

"Now praised be Allah!" he remarked aloud, with a world of genuine relief in his voice. "Should she stay fainted for a little while, that priest——"

He stalked into the middle of the outer room. He set the lamp down on a table and looked the priest over as a butcher might survey a sheep he is about to kill.

"Now—robber of orphans—bleeder of widows' blood—dog of an idol-briber! This stands between thee and Kharvani!" He drew his sword and flicked the edge of it. "And this!" He took up the tongs again. "There is none now to plead or to forbid! Think! Show me the way out of this devil's nest, or—" He raised the tongs again.

At that minute came a quiet knock. He set the tongs down again and crossed the room and opened the door.

CHAPTER VII

TREACHERY?

MAHOMMED KHAN closed the door again behind his half-brother and turned the key, but the half-brother shot the bolt home as well before he spoke, then listened intently for a minute with his ear to the keyhole.

"Where is the priest's son?" growled the Risaldar, in the Rajput tongue.

"I have him. I have the priestling in a sack. I have him trussed and bound and gagged, so that he can neither speak nor wriggle!"

"Where?"

"Hidden safely."

"I said to bring him here!"

"I could not. Listen! That ayah—where is she?"

"Dead! What has the ayah to do with it?"

"This—she was to give a sign. She was not to slay. She had leave only to take the jewels. Her orders were either to wait until she knew by questioning that the section would not return or else, when it had returned, to wait until the memsahib and Bellairs sahib slept, and then to make a sign. They grow tired of waiting now, for there is news! At Jundhra the rebels are defeated, and at Doonha likewise."

"How know you this?"

"By listening to the priests' talk while I

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lay in wait to snare the priestling. Nothing is known as yet as to what the guns or garrison at Doonha do, but it is known that they of Jundhra will march on Hanadra here. They search now for their High Priest, being minded to march out of here and set an ambush on the road."

"They have time. From Jundhra to here is a long march! Until to-morrow evening or the day following they have time!"

"Aye! And they have fear also! They seek their priest—listen."

There were voices plainly audible in the courtyard down below, and two more men stood at the foot of the winding stairway whispering. By listening intently they could hear almost what they said, for the stone stairway acted like a whispering-gallery, the voices echoing up it from wall to wall.

"Why do they seek him here?"

"They have sought elsewhere and not found him; and there is talk —— He claimed the memsahib as his share of the plunder. They think——"

Mahommed Khan glared at the trussed-up priest and swore a savage oath beneath his breath.

"Have they touched the stables yet?" he demanded.

"No, not yet. The loot is to be divided evenly among certain of the priests, and no man may yet lay a hand on it."

"Is there a guard there?"

"No. No one would steal what the priests claim, and the priests will not trust each other. So the horses stand in their stalls unwatched."

THE voices down the stairs grew louder, and the sound of footsteps began ascending, slowly and with hesitation.

"Quick!" said the Risaldar. "Light me that brazier again!"

Charcoal lights quickly, and before the steps had reached the landing Mahommed Khan had a hot coal glowing in his tongs.

"Now speak to them!" he growled at the shuddering priest. "Order them to go back to their temple and tell them that you follow!"

The priest shut his lips tight and shook his head. With rescue so near as that, he could see no reason to obey. But the hot coal touched him, and a Hindu who may be not at all afraid to die can not stand torture.

"I speak!" he answered, writhing.

"Speak, then!" said the Risaldar, choosing a larger coal.

Then, in the priest's language, which none—and least of all a Risaldar—can understand except the priests themselves, he began to shout directions, pitching his voice into a high, wailing, minor key. He was answered by another sing-song voice outside the door and he listened with a glowing coal held six inches from his eyes.

"An eye for a false move!" hissed Mahommed Khan. "Two eyes are the forfeit unless they go down the stairs again! Then my half-brother here will follow to the temple and if any watch, or stay behind, thy ears will sizzle!"

The High Priest raised his voice into a wail again, and the feet shuffled along the landing and descended

"Put down that coal!" he pleaded. "I have done thy bidding!"

"Watch through the window!" said the Risaldar. "Then follow!"

His giant half-brother peered from behind the curtain and listened. He could hear laughter, ribald, mocking laughter, but low, and plainly not intended for the High Priest's ears.

"They go!" he growled.

"Then follow."

Once again the Risaldar was left alone with the priest and the unconscious Ruth. She was suffering from the effects of long days and nights of nerve-destroying heat, with the shock of unexpected horror superadded, and she showed no disposition to recover consciousness. The priest, though, was very far from having lost his power to think.

"You are a fool!" he sneered at the Risaldar, but the sword leaped from its scabbard at the word and he changed that line of argument. "You hold cards and know not how to play them!"

"I know along which road my honor lies! I lay no plans to murder people in their sleep."

"Honor! And what is honor? What is the interest on honor—now much per cent.?"

The Risaldar turned his back on him, but the High Priest laughed.

"The days of the Raj are numbered!" said the priest. "The English will be slain to the last man and then where will you be? Where will be the profit on your honor?"

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The Risaldar listened, for he could not help it, but he made no answer.

"Me you hold here, a prisoner. You can slay or torture. But what good will that do? The woman that you guard will fall sooner or later into Hindu hands. You can not fight against a legion. Listen! I hold the strings of wealth. With a jerk I can unloose a fortune in your lap. I need that woman there!"

"For what?" snarled the Risaldar, whirling round on him, his eyes ablaze.

"For power! Kharvani's temple here has images and paintings and a voice that speaks—but no Kharvani!"

The Rajput turned away again and affected unconcern.

"Could Kharvani but appear, could her worshipers but see Kharvani manifest, what would a lakh, two lakhs, a crore of rupees mean to me, the High Priest of her temple? I could give thee anything! The power over all India would be in my hands! Kharvani would but appear and say thus and thus, and thus would it be done!"

The Risaldar's hand had risen to his mustache. His back was still turned on the priest, but he showed interest. His eyes wandered to where Ruth lay in a heap by the inner door and then away again.

"Who would believe it?" he growled in an undertone.

"They would all believe it! One and all! Even Mohammedans would become Hindus to worship at her shrine and beg her favors. Thou and I alone would share the secret. Listen! Loose me these bonds—my limbs ache."

Mahommed Khan turned. He stooped and cut them with his sword.

"Now I can talk," said the priest, sitting up and rubbing at his ankles. "Listen. Take thou two horses and gallop off, so that the rest may think that the white woman has escaped. Then return here secretly and name thy price—and hold thy tongue!"

"And leave her in thy hands?" asked the Risaldar.

"In my keeping."

"Bah! Who would trust a Hindu priest!"

The Rajput was plainly wavering and the priest stood up, to argue with him the better.

"What need to trust me? You, sahib, will know the secret, and none other but myself will know it. Would I, think you, be fool enough to tell the rest, or, by withholding just payment from you, incite you to spread it broadcast? You and I will know it and we alone. To me the power that it will bring—to you all the wealth you ever dreamed of, and more besides!"

"No other priests would know?"

"Not one of them! They will think that the woman has escaped!"

"And she—where would you keep her?"

"In a secret place I know of, below the temple."

"Does any other know it?"

"No. Not one!"

"Listen!" said the Risaldar, stroking at his beard. "This woman never did me any wrong—but she is a woman, not a man. I owe her no fealty, and yet—I would not like to see her injured. Were I to agree to thy plan, there would needs be a third man in the secret."

"Who? Name him," said the priest, grinning his satisfaction.

"My half-brother Suliman."

"Agreed!"

"He must go with us to the hiding-place and stay there as her servant."

"Is he a silent man?"

"Silent as the dead, unless I bid him speak!"

"Then, that is agreed; he and thou and I know of this secret, and none other is to know it! Why wait? Let us remove her to the hiding-place!"

"Wait yet for Suliman. How long will I be gone, think you, on my pretended flight?"

"Nay, what think you, sahib?"

"I think many hours. There may be those that watch, or some that ride after me. I think I shall not return until long after daylight, and then there will be no suspicions. Give me a token that will admit me safely back into Hanadra—some sign that the priests will know, and a pass to show to any one that bids me halt."

The priest held out his hand. "Take off that ring of mine!" he answered. "That is the sacred ring of Kharvani—and all men know it. None will touch thee or refuse thee anything, do they have but the merest sight of it!"

THE Risaldar drew off a clumsy silver ring, set with three stones—a sapphire and a ruby and an emerald, each one of which was worth a fortune by itself. He slipped it on his own

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finger and turned it round slowly, examining it.

"See how I trust thee," said the priest.

"More than I do thee!" muttered the Risaldar, but the priest did not catch his words.

"I hear my brother!" growled the Risaldar after another minute. "Be ready to show the way!"

He walked across the room to Ruth, tore a covering from a divan and wrapped her in it; then he opened the outer door for his half-brother.

"Is it well?" he asked in the Rajput tongue.

"All well!" boomed the half-brother, eying the unbound priest with unconcealed surprise.

"Do any watch?"

"Not one! The priests are in the temple; all who are not priests man the walls or rush here and there making ready."

"And the priestling?"

"Is where I left him."

"Where?—I said."

"In the niche underneath the arch, where I trapped the High Priest!"

"Are the horses fed and watered?"

"Ha, sahib!"

"Good! How is the niche opened where the priestling lies?"

"There is the trunk of an elephant, carved where the largest stone of all begins to curve outward, on the near side of the stone as you go outward from the court-yard."

"On which side of the archway, then?"

"On the left side, sahib. Press on the trunk downward and then pull; the stone swings outward. There are steps then—ten steps downward to the stone floor where the priestling lies."

"Good! I can find him. Now pick up the heavenborn yonder in those great arms of thine, and bear her gently! Gently, I said! So! Have a care, now, that she is not injured against the corners. My honor, aye, my honor and yours and all our duty to the Raj you bear and—and have a care of the corners!"

"Aye," answered the half-brother, stolidly, holding Ruth as though she had been a little bag of rice.

Again the Risaldar turned to the High Priest, and eyed him through eyes that glittered.

"We are ready!" he growled. "Lead on to thy hiding-place!"

CHAPTER VIII

A REPUTATION BASED ON PAST PERFORMANCES

THE guns rode first from Doonha, for the guns take precedence. The section ground-scouts were acting scouts for the division, two hundred yards ahead of every one. Behind the guns rode Colonel Forrester-Carter, followed by the wagon with the wounded; and last of all the two companies of the Thirty-third trudged through the stifling heat.

But, though the guns were ahead of every one, they had to suit their pace to that of the men who marched. For one thing, there might be an attack at any minute, and guns that are caught at close quarters at a distance from their escort are apt to be astonishingly helpless. They can act in unison with infantry; but alone, on bad ground, in the darkness, and with their horses nearly too tired to drag them, a leash of ten puppies in a crowd would be an easier thing to hurry with.

Young Bellairs had his men dismounted and walking by their mounts. Even the drivers led their horses, for two had been taken from each gun to drag the wounded, and the guns are calculated as a load for six, not four.

As he trudged through the blood-hot dust in clumsy riding-boots and led his charger on the left flank of the guns, Harry Bellairs fumed and fretted in a way to make no man envy him. The gloomy, ghost-like trees, that had flitted past him on the road to Doonha, crawled past him now—slowly and more slowly as his tired feet blistered in his boots. He could not mount and ride, though, for very shame, while his men were marching, and he dared not let them ride, for fear the horses might give in. He could just trudge and trudge, and hate himself and every one, and wonder.

What had the Risaldar contrived to do? Why hadn't he packed up his wife's effects the moment that his orders came and ridden off with her and the section at once, instead of waiting three hours or more for an escort for her? Why hadn't he realized at once that orders that came in a hurry that way, in the night-time, were not only urgent but ominous as well? What chance had the Risaldar—an old man, however willing he might be—to ride through a

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swarming countryside for thirty miles or more and bring back an escort? Why, even supposing Mahommed Khan had ridden off at once, he could scarcely be back again before the section! And what would have happened in the meantime?

Supposing the Risaldar's sons and grandsons refused to obey him? Stranger things than that had been known to happen! Suppose they were disloyal? And then—blacker thought than any yet!—suppose—suppose—— Why had Mahommed Khan, the hard-bitten, wise old war-dog, advised him to leave his wife behind? Did that seem like honest advice, on second thought? Mohammedans had joined in this outbreak as well as Hindus. The sepoys at Doonha were Mohammedans! Why had Mahommed Khan seemed so anxious to send him on his way? As though an extra five minutes would have mattered! Why had he objected to a last good-by to Mrs. Bellairs? . . . And then—he had shown a certain knowledge of the uprising; where had he obtained it? If he were loyal, who then had told him of it? Natives who are disloyal don't brag of their plans beforehand to men who are on the other side! And if he had known of it, and was still loyal, how was it that he had not divulged his information before the outbreak came? Would a loyal man hold his tongue until the last minute? Scarcely!

HE HALTED, pulled his horse to the middle of the road and waited for Colonel Carter to overtake him.

"Well? What is it?" asked the Colonel sharply.

"Can I ride on ahead, sir? My horse is good for it and I'm in agonies of apprehension about my wife!"

"No! Certainly not! You are needed to command your section!"

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I've a sergeant who can take command. He's a first-class man and perfectly dependable."

"You could do no good, even if you did ride on," said the Colonel, not unkindly.

"I'm thinking, sir, that Mahommed Khan——"

"Risaldar Mahommed Khan?"

"Yes, sir."

"Of the Rajput Horse?"

"Yes, sir. My father's Risaldar."

"You left your wife in his charge, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir, but I'm thinking that—that—perhaps the Risaldar—I mean—there seem to be Mohammedans at the bottom of this business, as well as Hindus. Perhaps——"

"Bellairs! Now hear me once and for all. You thank your God that the Risaldar turned up to guard her! Thank God that your father was man enough for Mahommed Khan to love and that you are your father's son! And listen! Don't let me hear you, ever, under any circumstances, breathe a word of doubt as to that man's loyalty! D' you understand me, sir? You, a mere subaltern, a puppy just out of his 'teens, an insignificant jackanapes with two twelve-pounders in your charge, daring to impute disloyalty to Mahommed Khan! —— your impudence! Remember this! That old Risaldar is the man who rode with your father through the guns at Dera! He's a pauper without a pension, for all his loyalty, but he went down the length of India to meet you, at his own expense, when you landed raw-green from England! And what d' you know of war, I'd like to know, that you didn't learn from him? Thank your God, sir, that there's some one there who'll kill your wife before she falls into the Hindus' hands!"

"But he was going to ride away, sir, to bring an escort!"

"Not before he'd made absolutely certain of her safety!" swore the Colonel with conviction. "Join your section, sir!"

So Harry Bellairs joined his section and trudged along sore-footed at its side—sore-hearted, too. He wondered whether any one would ever say as much for him as Colonel Carter had chosen to say for Mahommed Khan, or whether any one would have the right to say it! He was ashamed of having left his wife behind and tortured with anxiety and smarting from the snub—a medley of sensations that were more likely to make a man of him, if he had known it, than the whole experience of a year's campaign! But in the dust and darkness, with the blisters on his heels, and fifty men, who had overheard the Colonel, looking sideways at him, his plight was pitiable.

THEY trudged until the dawn began to rise, bright yellow below the drooping banian trees; only Colonel Carter and the advance-guard riding. Then, when they stopped at a stream to water horses and let them graze a bit and

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give the men a sorely needed rest, one of the ring of outposts loosed off his rifle and shouted an alarm. They had formed square in an instant, with the guns on one side and the men on three, and the Colonel and the wounded in the middle. A thousand or more of the mutineers leaned on their rifles on the shoulder of a hill and looked them over, a thousand yards away.

"Send them an invitation!" commanded Colonel Carter, and the left-hand gun barked out an overture, killing one sepoy. The rest made off in the direction of Hanadra.

"We're likely to have a hot reception when we reach there!" said Colonel Carter cheerily. "Well, we'll rest here for thirty minutes and give them a chance to get ready for us. I'm sorry there's no breakfast, men, but the sepoys will have dinner ready by the time we get there—we'll eat theirs!"

The chorus of ready laughter had scarcely died away when a horse's hoof-beats clattered in the distance from the direction of Doonha and a native cavalryman galloped into view, low-bent above his horse's neck. The foam from his horse was spattered over him and his lance swung pointing upward from the sling. On his left side the polished scabbard rose and fell in time to his horse's movement. He was urging his weary horse to put out every ounce he had in him. He drew rein, though, when he reached a turning in the road and saw the resting division in front of him, and walked his horse forward, patting his sweat-wet neck and easing him. But as he leaned to finger with his girths an ambushed sepoy fired at him, and he rammed in his spurs again and rode like a man possessed.

"This 'll be another untrustworthy Mohammedan!" said Colonel Carter in a pointed undertone, and Bellairs blushed crimson underneath the tan. "He's ridden through from Jundhra, with torture waiting for him if he happened to get caught, and no possible reward beyond his pay. Look out he doesn't spike your guns!"

The trooper rode straight up to Colonel Carter and saluted. He removed a tiny package from his cheek, where he had carried it so that he might swallow it at once in case of accident, tore the oiled-silk cover from it and handed it to him without a word, saluting again and leading his horse away. Colonel Carter unfolded the half-sheet of foreign note-paper and read:

DEAR COLONEL CARTER:

Your letter just received in which you say that you have blown up the magazine at Doonha and are marching to Hanadra with a view to the rescue of Mrs. Bellairs. This is in no sense intended as a criticism of your action or of your plan, but circumstances have made it seem advisable for me to transfer my own headquarters to Hanadra and I am just starting. I must ask you, please, to wait for me—at a spot as near to where this overtakes you as can be managed. If Mrs. Bellairs, or anybody else of ours, is in Hanadra, she—or they—are either dead by now or else prisoners. And if they are to be rescued by force, the larger the force employed the better. If you were to attack with your two companies before I reached you, you probably would be repulsed, and would, I think, endanger the lives of any prisoners that the enemy may hold. I am coming with my whole command as fast as possible.

Your Obedient Servant,
A. E. TURNER
Genl. Officer Commanding

"Men!" said Colonel Carter, in a ringing voice that gave not the slightest indication of his feelings, "we're to wait here for a while until the whole division overtakes us. The General has vacated Jundhra. Lie down and get all the rest you can!"

The murmur from the ranks was as difficult to read as Colonel Carter's voice had been. It might have meant pleasure at the thought of rest, or anger, or contempt, or almost anything. It was undefined and indefinable.

But there was no doubt at all as to how young Bellairs felt. He was sitting on a trunnion, sobbing, with his head bent low between his hands.

CHAPTER IX

SADDLE AND SPUR AT LAST

"COME, then!" said the High Priest. Mahommed Khan threw open the outer door and bowed sardonically. "Precedence for priests!" he sneered, tapping at his sword-hilt. "Thou goest first! Next come I, and last Suliman with the memsahib! Thus can I reach thee with my sword, O priest, and also protect her if need be!"

"Thou art trusting as a little child!" exclaimed the priest, passing out ahead of him.

"A priest and a liar and a thief—all three are one!" hummed the Risaldar. "Bear her gently, Suliman! Have a care,

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now, as you turn on the winding stairs!"

"Ha, sahib!" said the half-brother, carrying Ruth as easily as though she had been a little child.

At the foot of the stairway, in the blackness that seemed alive with phantom shadows, the High Priest paused and listened, stretching out his left hand against the wall to keep the other two behind him. From somewhere beyond the courtyard came the din of hurrying sandaled feet, scudding over cobblestones in one direction. The noise was incessant and not unlike the murmur of a rapid stream. Occasionally a voice was raised in some command or other, but the stream of sound continued, hurrying, hurrying, shuffling along to the southward.

"I have heard rats run that way!" growled the Risaldar.

"This way and watch a while," whispered the priest.

They climbed up a narrow stairway leading to a sort of battlement and peered over the top, Suliman laying Ruth Bellairs down in the darkest shadow he could find. She was beginning to recover consciousness, but apparently Mahommed Khan judged it best to take no notice of her.

Down below them they could see the city gate, wide open, with a blazing torch on either side of it, and through the gate, swarming like ants before the rains, there poured an endless stream of humans that marched — and marched — and marched; four, ten, fifteen abreast; all heights and sizes, jumbled in and out among one another, anyhow, without formation, but armed, every one of them, and all intent on marching to the southward, where Jundhra and Doonha lay. Some muttered to one another and some laughed, but the greater number marched in silence.

"That for thy English!" grinned the priest. "Can the English troops overcome that horde?"

"Hey-eee! For a troop or two of Rajputs!" sighed the Risaldar. "Or English Lancers! They would ride through that as an ax goes through the brushwood!"

"Bah!" said the priest. "All soldiers boast! There will be a houghing shortly after dawn. The days of thy English are now numbered."

"By those—there?"

"Ay, by those, there! Come!"

They climbed down the steps again, the Rajput humming to himself and smiling grimly into his mustache.

"Ay! There will be a houghing shortly after dawn!" he muttered. "Would only that I were there to see! . . . Where are the sepoys?" he demanded.

"I know not. How should I know, who have been thy guest these hours past? This march is none of my ordering."

THE priest pressed hard on a stone knob that seemed to be part of the carving on a wall, then he leaned his weight against the wall and a huge stone swung inward, while a fetid breath of air wafted outward in their faces.

"None know this road but I!" exclaimed the priest.

"None need to!" said the Risaldar. "Pass on, snake, into thy hole. We follow."

"Steps!" said the priest, and began descending.

"Curses!" said the Risaldar, stumbling and falling down on top of him. "Have a care, Suliman! The stone is wet and slippery."

Down, down they climbed, one behind the other, Suliman grunting beneath his burden and the Risaldar keeping up a running fire of oaths. Each time that he slipped, and that was often, he cursed the priest and cautioned Suliman. But the priest only laughed, and apparently Suliman was sure-footed, for he never stumbled once. They seemed to be diving down into the bowels of the earth. They were in pitch-black darkness, for the stone had swung to behind them of its own accord. The wall on either side of them was wet with slime and the stink of decaying ages rose and almost stifled them. But the priest kept on descending, so fast that the other two had trouble to keep up with him, and he hummed to himself as though he knew the road and liked it.

"The bottom!" he called back suddenly. "From now the going is easy, until we rise again. We pass now under the city wall."

But they could see nothing and hear nothing except their own footfalls swishing in the ooze beneath them. Even the priest's words seemed to be lost at once, as though he spoke into a blanket, for the air they breathed was thicker than a mist and just as damp. They walked on, along a level, wet, stone passage for at least five minutes, feeling their way with one hand on the wall.

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"Steps, now!" said the priest. "Have a care, now, for the lower ones are slippery."

Ruth was regaining consciousness. She began to move and tried once or twice to speak.

"Here, thou!" growled the Risaldar. "Thou art a younger man than I—come back here. Help with the memsahib."

The priest came back a step or two, but Suliman declined his aid, snarling vile insults at him.

"I can manage!" he growled. "Get thou behind me, Mahommed Khan, in case I slip!"

So Mahommed Khan came last, and they slipped and grunted upward, round and round a spiral staircase that was hewn out of solid rock. No light came through from anywhere to help them, but the priest climbed on, as though he were accustomed to the stair and knew the way from constant use. After five minutes of steady climbing the stone grew gradually dry. The steps became smaller, too, and deeper, and not so hard to climb. Suddenly the priest reached out his arm and pulled at something or other that hung down in the darkness. A stone in the wall rolled open. A flood of light burst in and nearly blinded them.

"We are below Kharvani's temple!" announced the priest.

HE LED them through the opening into a four-square room hewn from the rock below the foundations of the temple some time in the dawn of history. The light that had blinded them when they first emerged proved to be nothing but the flicker of two small oil lamps that hung suspended by brass chains from the painted ceiling. The only furniture was mats spread on the cut-stone floor.

"By which way did we come?" asked the Risaldar, staring in amazement round the walls. There was not a door nor crack, nor any sign of one, except that a wooden ladder in one corner led to a trap-door overhead, and they had certainly not entered by the ladder.

"Nay! That is a secret!" grinned the priest. "He who can may find the opening! Here can the woman and her servant stay until we need them."

"Here in this place?"

"Where else? No man but I knows of this crypt! The ladder there leads to another room, where there is yet another ladder, and that one leads out through a secret door I know of, straight into the temple. Art ready? There is need for haste!"

"Wait!" said the Risaldar.

"These soldiers!" sneered the priest. "It is wait—wait—wait with them, always!"

"Hast thou a son?"

"Ay! But what of it?"

"I said 'hast,' not 'hadst'!"

"Ay. I have a son."

"Where?"

"In one of the temple-chambers overhead."

"Nay, priest! Thy son lies gagged and bound and trussed in a place I know of, and which thou dost not know!"

"Since when?"

"Since by my orders he was laid there."

"Thou art the devil! Thou liest, Rajput!"

"So? Go seek thy son!"

The priest's face had blanched beneath the olive of his skin, and he stared at Mahommed Khan through distended eyes.

"My son!" he muttered.

"Aye! Thy priestling! He stays where he is, as hostage, until my return! Also the heavenborn stays here! If, on my return, I find the heavenborn safe and sound, I will exchange her for thy son—and if not, I will tear thy son into little pieces before thy eyes, priest! Dost thou understand?"

"Thou liest! My son is overhead in the temple here!"

"Go seek him, then!"

THE priest turned and scampered up the ladder with an agility that was astonishing in a man of his build and paunch.

"Hanuman should have been thy master!" jeered the Risaldar. "So run the bandar-log, the monkey-folk!"

But the priest had no time to answer him. He was half frantic with the sickening fear of a father for his only son.

He returned ten minutes later, panting, and more scared than ever.

"Go, take thy white woman," he exclaimed, "and give me my son back!"

"Nay, priest! Shall I ride with her alone through that horde that are marching through the gate? I go now for an escort; in eight—ten—twelve—I know not how many hours, I will return for her, and

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then—thy son will be exchanged for her, or he dies thus in many pieces!"

He turned to Suliman. "Is she awake yet?" he demanded.

"Barely, but she recovers."

"Then tell her, when consciousness returns, that I have gone and will return for her. And stay here, thou, and guard her until I come."

"Ha, sahib!"

"Now, show the way!"

"But—" said the priest, "our bargain? The price that we agreed on—one lakh, was it not?"

"One lakh of devils take thee and tear thee into little pieces! Wouldst bribe a Rajput, a Risaldar? For that insult I will repay thee one day with interest, O priest! Now, show the way!"

"But how shall I be sure about my son?"

"Be sure that the priestling will starve to death or die of thirst or choke, unless I hurry! He is none too easy where he lies!"

"Go! Hurry, then!" swore the priest. "May all the gods there are, and thy Allah with them, afflict thee with all their curses—thee and thine! Up with you! Up that ladder! Run! But, if the gods will, I will meet thee again when the storm is over!"

"Inshallah!" growled Mahommed Khan.

Ten minutes later a crash and a clatter and a shower of sparks broke out in the sweltering courtyard where the guns had stood and waited. It was Shaitan, young Bellairs's Khaubuli charger, with his haunches under him, plunging across the flagstones, through the black-dark archway, out on the plain beyond—in answer to the long, sharp-roweled spurs of the Risaldar Mahommed Khan.

CHAPTER X

MAHOMMED KHAN PROVES BETTER THAN HIS WORD

DAWN broke and the roofs of old Hanadra became resplendent with the varied colors of turbans and pugrees and shawls. As though the rising sun had loosed the spell, a myriad tongues, of women chiefly, rose in a babel of clamor, and the few men who had been left in Hanadra by the night's armed exodus came all together and growled prophetically in undertones. Now was the day of days, when that part of India, at least, should cast off the English yoke.

To the temple! The cry went up before the sun was fifteen minutes high. There are a hundred temples in Hanadra, age-old all of them and carved on the outside with strange images of heathen gods in high relief, like molds turned inside out. But there is but one temple that that cry could mean—Kharvani's; and there could be but one meaning for the cry. Man, woman and child would pray Kharvani, Bride of Siva the Destroyer, to intercede with Siva and cause him to rise and smite the English. On the sky-line, glinting like flashed signals in the early sun, bright English bayonets had appeared; and between them and Hanadra was a dense black mass, the whole of old Hanadra's able-bodied manhood, lined up to defend the city. Now was the time to pray. Fifty to one are by no means despicable odds, but the aid of the gods as well is better!

So the huge dome of Kharvani's temple began to echo to the sound of slippered feet and awe-struck whisperings, and the big, dim auditorium soon filled to overflowing. No light came in from the outer world. There was nothing to illuminate the mysteries except the chain-hung grease-lamps swinging here and there from beams, and they served only to make the darkness visible. Bats flicked in and out between them and disappeared in the echoing gloom above. Censers belched out sweet-smelling, pungent clouds of sandalwood to drown the stench of hot humanity, and the huge graven image of Kharvani—serene and smiling and indifferent—stared round-eyed from the darkness.

Then a priest's voice boomed out in a solemn incantation and the whispering hushed. He chanted age-old verses, whose very meaning was forgotten in the womb of time—forgotten as the artist who had painted the picture of idealized Kharvani on the wall. Ten priests, five on either side of the tremendous idol, emerged chanting from the gloom behind, and then a gong rang, sweetly, clearly, suddenly, and the chanting ceased. Out stepped the High Priest from a niche below the image, and his voice rose in a wailing, sing-song cadence that reëchoed from the dome and sent a thrill through every one who heard.

His chant had scarcely ceased when the temple door burst open and a man rushed in.

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"They have begun!" he shouted. "The battle has begun!"

AS THOUGH in ready confirmation of his words, the distant reverberating boom of cannon filtered through the doorway from the world of grim realities outside.

"They have twenty cannon with them! They have more guns than we have!" wailed he who brought the news. Again began the chanting that sought the aid of Siva the Destroyer. Only, there were fewer who listened to this second chant. Those who were near the doorway slipped outside and joined the watching hundreds on the roofs.

For an hour the prayers continued in the stifling gloom, priest relieving priest and chant following on chant, until the temple was half emptied of its audience. One by one, and then by twos and threes, the worshipers succumbed to human curiosity and crept stealthily outside to watch.

Another messenger ran in and shouted: "They have charged! Their cavalry have charged! They are beaten back! Their dead lie twisted on the plain!"

At the words there was a stampede from the doorway, and half of those who had remained rushed out. There were hundreds still there, though, for that great gloomy pile of Kharvani's could hold an almost countless crowd.

Within another hour the same man rushed to the door again and shouted:

"Help comes! Horsemen are coming from the north! Rajputs, riding like leaves before the wind! Even the Mussulmans are for us!"

But the chanting never ceased. No one stopped to doubt the friendship of arrivals from the north, for to that side there were no English, and England's friends would surely follow by-roads to her aid. The city gates were wide open to admit wounded or messengers or friends—with a view, even, to a possible retreat—and whoever cared could ride through them unchallenged and unchecked.

EVEN when the crash of horses' hoofs rattled on the stone paving outside the temple there was no suspicion. No move was made to find out who it was who rode. But when the temple door reëchoed to the thunder of a sword-hilt and a voice roared "Open!" there was something like a panic. The chanting stopped and the priests and the High Priest listened to the stamping on the stone pavement at the temple front.

"Open!" roared a voice again, and the thundering on the panels recommenced. Then some one drew the bolt and a horse's head—a huge Khaubuli stallion's—appeared, snorting and panting and wild-eyed.

"Farward!" roared the Risaldar Mahommed Khan, kneeing on young Bellairs's winded charger.

"Farm twos! Farward!"

Straight into the temple, two by two, behind the Risaldar, rode two fierce lines of Rajputs, overturning men amd women—their drawn swords pointing this way and that—their dark eyes gleaming. Without a word to any one they rode up to the image, where the priests stood in an astonished herd.

"Fron--tt farm! Rear rank—'bout—face!" barked the Risaldar, and there was another clattering and stamping on the stone floor as the panting chargers pranced into the fresh formation, back to back.

"The memsahib!" growled Mahommed Khan. "Where is she?"

"My son!" said the High Priest. "Bring me my son!"

"A life for a life! The heavenborn first!"

"Nay! Show me my son first!"

The Risaldar leaped from his horse and tossed his reins to the man behind him. In a second his sword was at the High Priest's throat.

"Where is that secret stair?" he growled. "Lead on!"

The sword-point pricked him. Two priests tried to interfere, but wilted and collapsed with fright as four fierce, black-bearded Rajputs spurred their horses forward. The sword-point pricked still deeper.

"My son!" said the High Priest.

"A life for a life! Lead on!"

The High Priest surrendered, with a dark and cunning look, though, that hinted at something or other in reserve. He pulled at a piece of carving on the wall behind and pointed to a stair that showed behind the out-swung door. Then he plucked another priest by the sleeve and whispered.

The priest passed on the whisper. A third priest turned and ran.

"That way!" said the High Priest, pointing.

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"I? Nay! I go not down!" He raised his voice into an ululating howl. "O Suliman!" he bellowed. "Suliman! O! Suliman! Bring up the heavenborn!"

A growl like the distant rumble from a bear-pit answered him. Then Ruth Bellairs's voice was heard calling up the stairway.

"Is that you, Mahommed Khan?"

"Ay, memsahib!"

"Good! I'm coming!"

She had recovered far enough to climb the ladder and the steep stone stair above it, and Suliman climbed up behind her, grumbling dreadful prophecies of what would happen to the priests now that Mahommed Khan had come.

"Is all well, Risaldar?" she asked him.

"Nay, heavenborn! All is not well yet! The General sahib from Jundhra and your husband's guns and others, making one division, are engaged with the rebels eight or nine miles from here. We saw part of the battle as we rode!"

"Who wins?"

"It is doubtful, heavenborn! How could we tell from this distance?"

"Have you a horse for me?"

"Ay, heavenborn! Here! Bring up that horse, thou, and Suliman's! Ride him cross-saddle, heavenborn—there were no side-saddles in Siroeh! Nay, he is just a little frightened. He will stand—he will not throw thee! I did better than I thought, heavenborn. I come with four-and-twenty, making twenty-six with me and Suliman. An escort for a queen! So—sit him quietly. Leave the reins free. Suliman will lead him! Ho! Fronnnt! Rank—'bout—face!"

"My son!" wailed the High Priest. "Where is my son?"

"Tell him, Suliman!"

"Where I caught thee, thou idol-briber!" snarled the Risaldar's half-brother.

"Where? In that den of stinks. Gagged and bound all this while?"

"Ha! Gagged and bound and out of mischief, where all priests and priests' sons ought to be!" laughed Mahommed Khan. "Farward! Farm twos! Ter-r-r-ott!"

IN WENT the spur, and the snorting, rattling, clanking cavalcade sidled and pranced out of the temple into the sunshine, with Ruth and Suliman in the midst of them.

"Gallop!" roared the Risaldar, the moment that the last horse was clear of the temple-doors. And in that instant he saw what the High Priest's whispering had meant.

Coming up the street toward them was a horde of silent, hurrying Hindus, armed with swords and spears, wearing all of them the caste-marks of the Brahman——well-fed, indignant relations of the priests, intent on avenging the defilement of Kharvani's temple.

"Canter! Fronnnt — farm — Gallop! Charge!"

Ruth found herself in the midst of a whirlwind of flashing sabers, astride of a lean-flanked Katiawari gelding that could streak like an antelope, knee to knee with a pair of bearded Rajputs, one of whom gripped her bridle-rein—thundering down a city street straight for a hundred swords that blocked her path. She set her eyes on the middle of Mahommed Khan's straight back, gripped the saddle with both hands, set her teeth and waited for the shock. Mahommed Khan's right arm rose and his sword flashed in the sunlight as he stood up in his stirrups. She shut her eyes. But there was no shock! There was the swish of whirling steel, the thunder of the hoofs, the sound of bodies falling. There was a scream or two as well and a coarse-mouthed Rajput oath. But when she dared to open her eyes once more they were thundering still, headlong down the city street and Mahommed Khan was whirling his sword in mid-air to shake the blood from it.

Ahead lay the city gate and she could see another swarm of Hindus rushing from either side to close it. But "Charge!" yelled Mahommed Khan again, and they swept through the crowd, through the half-shut gate, out on the plain beyond, as a wind sweeps through the forest, leaving fallen tree-trunks in its wake.

"Halt!" roared the Risaldar, when they were safely out of range. "Are any hurt? No? Good for us that their rifles are all in the firing-line yonder!"

He sat for a minute peering underneath his hand at the distant, dark, serried mass of men and the steel-tipped lines beyond it, watching the belching cannon and the spurting flames of the close-range rifle-fire.

"See, heavenborn!" he said, pointing. "Those will be your husband's guns! See, over on the left, there. See! They fire!

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Those two! We can reach them if we make a circuit on the flank here!"

"But can we get through, Risaldar? Won't they see us and cut us off?"

"Heavenborn!" he answered, "men who dare ride into a city temple and snatch thee from the arms of priests dare and can do anything! Take this, heavenborn—take it as a keepsake, in case aught happens!"

He drew off the priest's ring, gave it to her and then, before she could reply:

"Canter!" he roared. The horses sprang forward in answer to the spurs and there was nothing for Ruth to do but watch the distant battle and listen to the deep breathing of the Rajputs on either hand.

CHAPTER XI

THE SALT HE HAD EATEN

THERE could be no retreat that day and no thought of it. Jundhra and Doonha were in ruins. The bridges were down behind them and Hanadra lay ahead. The British had to win their way into it or perish. Tired out, breakfastless, suffering from the baking heat, the long, thin British line had got—not to hold at bay but to smash and pierce—an overwhelming force of Hindus that was stiffened up and down its length by small detachments of native soldiers who had mutinied.

Numbers were against them, and even superiority of weapons was not so overwhelmingly in their favor, for those were the days of short-range rifle-fire and smooth-bore artillery, and one gun was considerably like another. The mutinous sepoys had their rifles with them; there were guns from the ramparts of Hanadra that were capable of quite efficient service at close range; and practically every man in the dense-packed rebel line had a firearm of some kind. It was only in cavalry and discipline and pluck that the British force had the advantage, and the cavalry had already charged once and had been repulsed.

General Turner rode up and down the sweltering firing-line, encouraging the men when it seemed to him they needed it and giving directions to his officers. He was hidden from view oftener than not by the rolling clouds of smoke and he popped up here and there suddenly and unexpectedly. Wherever he appeared there was an immediate stiffening among the ranks, as though he carried a supply of spare enthusiasm with him and could hand it out.

Colonel Carter, commanding the right wing, turned his head for a second at the sound of a horse's feet and found the General beside him.

"Had I better have my wounded laid in a wagon, sir?" he suggested, "in case you find it necessary to fall back?"

"There will be no retreat!" said General Turner. "Leave your wounded where they are. I never saw a cannon bleed before. How's that?"

He spurred his horse over to where one of Bellairs's guns was being run forward into place again and Colonel Carter followed him. There was blood dripping from the muzzle of it.

"We're short of water, sir!" said Colonel Carter.

As he spoke a gunner dipped his sponge into a pool of blood and rammed it home.

Bellairs was standing between his two guns, looking like the shadow of himself, worn out with lack of sleep, disheveled, wounded. There was blood dripping from his forehead and he wore his left arm in a sling made from his shirt.

"Fire!" he ordered, and the two guns barked in unison and jumped back two yards or more.

"If you'll look," said General Turner, plucking at the Colonel's sleeve, "you'll see a handful of native cavalry over yonder behind the enemy—rather to the enemy's left—there—between those two clouds of smoke. D'you see them?"

"They look like Sikhs or Rajputs," said the Colonel.

"Yes. Don't they. I'd like you to keep an eye on them. They've come up from the rear. I caught sight of them quite a while ago and I can't quite make them out. It's strange, but I can't believe that they belong to the enemy. D' you see?—there—they've changed direction. They're riding as though they intended to come round the enemy's left flank!"

"By Gad, they are! Look! The enemy are moving to cut them off!"

"I must get back to the other wing!" said General Turner. "But that looks like the making of an opportunity! Keep both eyes lifting, Carter, and advance the moment you see any confusion in the enemy's ranks."

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HE RODE off, and Colonel Carter stared long and steadily at the approaching horsemen. He saw a dense mass of the enemy, about a thousand strong, detach itself from the left wing and move to intercept them, and he noticed that the movement made a tremendous difference to the ranks opposed to him. He stepped up to young Bellairs and touched his sleeve. Bellairs started like a man roused from a dream.

"That's your wife over there!" said Colonel Carter. "There can't be any other white woman hereabouts riding with a Rajput escort!"

Bellairs gripped the Colonel's outstretched arm.

"Where?" he almost screamed. "Where? I don't see her!"

"There, man! There, where that mass of men is moving! Look! By the Lord Harry! He's charging right through the mob! That's Mahommed Khan, I'll bet a fortune! Now's our chance! Bugler!"

The bugler ran to him, and he began to puff into his instrument.

"Blow the 'attention' first!"

Out rang the clear, strident notes, and the non-commissioned officers and men took notice that a movement of some kind would shortly be required of them, but the din of firing never ceased for a single instant. Then, suddenly, an answering bugle sang out from the other flank.

"Advance in echelon!" commanded Colonel Carter, and the bugler did his best to split his cheeks in a battle-rending blast.

"You remain where you are, sir!" he ordered young Bellairs. "Keep your guns served to the utmost!"

Six-and-twenty horsemen, riding full-tilt at a thousand men, may look like a trifle, but they are disconcerting. What they hit, they kill; and if they succeed in striking home, they play old Harry with formations. And Risaldar Mahommed Khan did strike home. He changed direction suddenly and, instead of using up his horses' strength in outflanking the enemy, who had marched to intercept him, and making a running target of his small command, he did the unexpected—which is the one best thing to do in war. He led his six-and-twenty at a headlong gallop straight for the middle of the crowd—it could not be called by any military name. They fired one ragged volley at him and then had no time to load before he was in the middle of them, slashing right and left and pressing forward. They gave way, right and left, before him, and a good number of them ran. Half a hundred of them were cut down as they fled toward their firing-line. At that second, just as the Risaldar and his handful burst through the mob and the mob began rushing wildly out of his way, the British bugles blared out the command to advance in echelon.

The Indians were caught between a fire and a charge that they had good reason to fear in front of them, and a disturbance on their left flank that might mean anything. As one-half of them turned wildly to face what might be coming from this unexpected quarter, the British troops came on with a roar, and at the same moment Mahommed Khan reached the rear of their firing-line and crashed headlong into it.

In a second the whole Indian line was in confusion and in another minute it was in full retreat—not knowing nor even guessing what had routed it. Retreat grew into panic and panic to stampede and, five minutes after the Risaldar's appearance on the scene, half of the Indian line was rushing wildly for Hanadra and the other half was retiring sullenly in comparatively dense and decent order.

BELLAIRS could not see all that happened. The smoke from his own guns obscured the view, and the necessity for giving orders to his men prevented him from watching as he would have wished. But he saw the Rajputs burst out through the Indian ranks and he saw his own charger—Shaitan the unmistakable—careering across the plain toward him riderless.

"For the love of God!" he groaned, raising both fists to heaven, "has she got this far, and then been killed! Oh, what in Hades did I entrust her to an Indian for? The pig-headed, brave old fool! Why couldn't he ride round them, instead of charging through?"

As he groaned aloud, too wretched even to think of what his duty was, a galloper rode up to him.

"Bring up your guns, sir, please!" he ordered. "You're asked to hurry! Take up position on that rising ground and warm up the enemy's retreat!"

"Limber up!" shouted Bellairs, coming

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to himself again. Fifteen seconds later his two guns were thundering up the rise.

As he brought them to "action front" and tried to collect his thoughts to figure out the range, a finger touched his shoulder and he turned to see another artillery officer standing by him.

"I've been lent from another section," he explained. "You're wanted."

"Where?"

"Over there, where you see Colonel Carter standing. It's your wife wants you, I think!"

Bellairs did not wait for explanations. He sent for his horse and mounted and rode across the intervening space at a break-neck gallop that he could barely stop in time to save himself from knocking the Colonel over. A second later he was in Ruth's arms.

"I thought you were dead when I saw Shaitan!" he said. He was nearly sobbing.

"No, Mahommed Khan rode him," she answered, and she made no pretense about not sobbing. She was crying like a child.

"Salaam, Bellairs sahib!" said a weak voice close to him. He noticed Colonel Carter bending over a prostrate figure, lifting the head up on his knee. There were three Rajputs standing between, though, and he could not see whose the figure was.

"Come over here!" said Colonel Carter, and young Bellairs obeyed him, leaving Ruth sitting on the ground where she was.

"Wouldn't you care to thank Mahommed Khan?"

It was a little cruel of the Colonel to put quite so much venom in his voice, for, when all is said and done, a man has almost a right to be forgetful when he has just had his young wife brought him out of the jaws of death. At least he has a good excuse for it. The sting of the reproof left him bereft of words and he stood looking down at the old Risaldar, saying nothing and feeling very much ashamed.

"Salaam, Bellairs sahib!" The voice was growing feebler.

"I would have done more for thy father's son! Thou art welcome. Aie! But thy charger is a good one! Good-by! Time is short, and I would talk with the Colonel sahib!"

He waved Bellairs away with a motion of his hand and the lieutenant went back to his wife again.

"He sent me away just like that, too!" she told him. "He said he had no time left to talk to women!"

COLONEL CARTER bent down again above the Risaldar, and listened to as much as he had time to tell of what had happened.

"But couldn't you have ridden round them, Risaldar?" he asked them.

"Nay, sahib! It was touch and go! I gave the touch! I saw as I rode how close the issue was and I saw my chance and took it! Had the memsahib been slain, she had at least died in full view of the English—and there was a battle to be won. What would you? I am a soldier—I."

"Indeed you are!" swore Colonel Carter.

"Sahib! Call my sons!"

His sons were standing near him, but the Colonel called up his grandsons, who had been told to stand at a little distance off. They clustered round the Risaldar in silence, and he looked them over and counted them.

"All here?" he asked.

"All here!"

"Whose sons and grandsons are ye?"

"Thine!" came the chorus.

"This sahib says that having done my bidding and delivered her ye rode to rescue, ye are no more bound to the Raj. Ye may return to your homes if ye wish."

There was no answer.

"Ye may fight for the rebels, if ye wish! There will be a safe-permit written."

Again there was no answer.

"For whom, then, fight ye?"

"For the Raj!" The deep-throated answer rang out promptly from every one of them, and they stood with their sword-hilts thrust out toward the Colonel. He rose and touched each hilt in turn.

"They are now thy servants!" said the Risaldar, laying his head back. "It is good! I go now. Give my salaams to General Turner sahib!"

"Good-by, old war-dog!" growled the Colonel, in an Anglo-Saxon effort to disguise emotion. He gripped at the right hand that was stretched out on the ground beside him, but it was lifeless.

Risaldar Mahommed Khan, two-medal man and pensionless gentleman-at-large, had gone to turn in his account of how he had remembered the salt which he had eaten.

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The CAMP-FIRE

A MEETING PLACE for READERS, WRITERS & ADVENTURERS

WRITES Donald Francis McGrew concerning "The Wail of the Pogaree":

In the true version of the tale, the boy was hanged at Iligan. And old Qudrat never regained his sanity. His madness took the form of brooding over the loss of his boy, and he spent days at a time over plans of vengeance against the Deity he had heretofore bowed to, but whom, he held, had cursed and reviled him and robbed him of his son who was all in all to him.

And of silver and jewels and ebony, taken in blood, old Qudrat fashioned the Silver Creese, "and, this unique weapon in hand, he climbed Mt. Holy, just off Marahui butte (where Camp Kiethley now sits) and thought to come to close quarters with Allah on the heights."

Of course he never came back, but the Silver Creese, they say, went forth to almost endless adventures, always bloody, and—but those tales Mr. McGrew is embodying in stories of his own, and I must not trespass.

DOUBTLESS you read in the papers some months ago of the capture and death of that famous American ivory-poacher and self-made king of the African jungle, James Ward Rogers. As soon as the news of the final chapter in this adventurer's life reached this country, Captain Foran wrote immediately to the man who had been in at the death, an old friend, Captain Fox, and it is from Captain Fox's letter in reply that the article in this number was constructed—from that letter and Captain Foran's previous personal knowledge of James Ward Rogers and the country he ruled.

HUGH PENDEXTER, whom you have met in this and other numbers of ADVENTURE, and in the pages of many other publications, was for years a newspaper man in New York, but returned to the woods of his native Maine not long ago to wield the pen solely on his own account. Besides being the author of "Tiberius Smith" he is adding to his credit the "Camp and Trail Series" and the "Along the Coast Series," six volumes each.

CHARLES CAMPBELL JONES, the poet back of "The Song of the Rapid Fire," says nothing much ever happened to him except being run over by one switch-engine and three box-cars.

It happened in Yuma, Ariz. At the south end of the yards there is a point of rocks locally known as "Dead Man's Curve." However, I had nothing to do with the christening.

One other man and I were on a "speeder;" it was night; the engine crew did not see us, nor did we see the engine until it was upon us. I went down on my face between the rails and the engine and three cars went over me. I got a broken back and other injuries.

Paralysis from the waist down resulted. I spend about three-fourths of my time in bed, the other fourth in an invalid chair. Much of my work, typewriting included, is done in bed. I can lie on either side and make the "mill" sit up and beg, for which accomplishment I am not likely to be envied. But it all goes in the day's work.

I began this particular incarnation on top of a pile of rocks known as Mt. Pisgah, at Hannibal, Mo., and became naturally a rolling stone. I stopped rolling at Yuma when I was twenty-one—that's five years ago.

But isn't he still an adventurer? For isn't facing heavy odds with an undaunted spirit the very essence of adventure?

WHEN he sent us "The Aro Mystery," finding myself in the dark on certain points, I wrote to Thomas Samson Miller. The following, from his reply:

Aro—Decidedly there is a real Aro. Dr. Barth, the German explorer of the Niger, mentions it as "Aro, the mysterious city of sins in the depths of the unexplored forests." When I was in charge of Jebba—a station on the Niger—I had for guests the officers of a punitive expedition. At dinner the talk

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turned on superstitions and Aro was mentioned. From that night's talk and certain personal experiences I got "The Aro Mystery." I heard a weak-faced missionary talking of it aboard ship as the holy-of-holies of ju-juism. Actually no one seems to have seen it or learned its exact location, other than that it is hidden in the depths of the Niger Delta, the largest delta in the world. I make my Aro out of an actual village I know.

Guns—How many citizens of the little towns of the Middle West have seen marines? Yet the proportion of whites to negro population in Nigeria is much less than that of marines to inhabitants of the United States. The whites live on the fringe of the country, never far from the river, so that a short march from the trading stations will bring one to blacks who have never seen whites and know guns only by fearful repute. All over West Africa is a terror of guns. I have seen blacks palsied with fright of them, and I have seen others handle cartridges and loaded rifles with the dangerous innocence of a child. Some of the tribes possess flintlocks—it is part of the company's trade, though it is unlawful to sell modern magazines rifles to the natives.

In the firing of the bearers' guns in the story you certainly raise a point that I was not unmindful of when I wrote, and did arrest the story to work in an explanation, but discarded it as unnecessary when I considered that the bearers' guns were a quarter-mile off, and that the interpolated explanation spoiled a tense part of the story.

SOMETIMES I get inquiries as to whether Camp-Fire membership is limited to writers. Well, *hardly*.

FOR a year or more, it worried me that, with the world so full of real adventurers, the Camp-Fire was the only place I knew where they could get together. And there they could not meet in the flesh.

Why shouldn't there be a regular club for adventurers? From time to time I talked it over with Stephen Allen Reynolds and others of my Camp-Fire friends, and gradually the idea took shape. All we consulted were enthusiastic.

Our plan was to have an organization with no rules, no officers, no dues, no formality of any kind. To meet for dinner at a certain place on a certain day of the month, so that stray wanderers might always know where and when to find the "bunch." For purpose, the fellowship of congenial spirits, the interchange of ideas and reminiscences among those who know the bite of the *Wanderlust*, and any mutual benefits that may occasionally arise therefrom. No one to be admitted who has not "been somewhere or done something." Mere bohemians and professional joiners barred; adventurers, explorers, sailors, soldiers, travelers, filibusters, soldiers of fortune and other kindred spirits welcomed.

WELL, a week before this was written, the plan took shape at an organization dinner in the "Barn Room" (please note carefully the "n" in "Barn") of a well-known New York restaurant. Thirty-three drew up their chairs to the horseshoe table, and those thirty-three stood for Asia, Europe, Africa, North and South America and Australia, for the ice of Arctic and Antarctic and the simmering heat of the Equator, for the land, the sea and the air.

As I glance down a comparatively brief record of these men and what they have done, I grow a bit dizzy. Here and there my eyes hit upon such as Saskatchewan, dik-dik, commanded French battery in Algeria, Arctic explorer, Balkans, Hawaii, gold prospector, aviator, Russia, rescuer of Evangeline Cisneros, Protectorate of Johore, sheriff, three shipwrecks, Alaska, revenue officer, South Seas, organized Diaz's army, Tibet, sailor, New Zealand, Boer War, his two comrades killed in the attempt, Labrador, war correspondent, Philippines, price on his head by Turkey, English army officer, Bolivia, Ceylon, Chinese river-pirates, interior of Morocco, Vanderbilt cup-race, South Seas, Portugal, cowpuncher, tropical tramp, Straits of Magellan, stage-driver, British East Africa, whaler, Greek vice-consul, Kamukara, mining for rubies, Greenland—but perhaps you're a bit dizzy yourself.

SIDE by side sat Colonel J. W. Church, who, among other things, organized the army of Bolivia, and Ledward Rawlinson, whose world-wanderings stopped for a while on the high plateau of that same country, swapping experiences among the Latin races to the south of us. Henry Collins Walsh, Frederick H. Chase, Henry Brevoort Kane, Hulbert Footner, Anville Eager, Stephen A. Reynolds, Robert Welles Ritchie and others found more or less common ground in the vast reaches of British Columbia, Alaska and the Arctic.

Will Irwin, for all the vast experience that has made him probably the greatest American journalist (even if he does prefer the term "newspaperman") in the United States, became so absorbed in Captain Fritz Joubert Duquesne's story of his escape from the British prison in Bermuda that, after the dinner was all over, some six or eight of

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us, including Talbot Mundy, who served against Duquesne in the war, adjourned to a table down-stairs till half-past two in the morning while the rest of that dramatic tale of the Boer's escape was being unfolded. We'd have stayed till eight in the morning if it had lasted.

H. D. Couzens, R. B. Kidd, A. E. Dingle, and others journeyed back together to the South Seas. Donald Francis McGrew and James E. Dwyer hiked to the Philippines. The Boer War brought together another group, Boer and English, but they were separated before any harm was done.

AND there were toasts drunk. And, of course, toasts only. "To the Game!" "To every lost trail, lost cause, and lost comrade, Gentlemen Adventurers, bottoms up!" And another, which was perhaps drunk with most acclaim—"To adventure—the shadow of every red-blooded man!"

From Chicago came a telegram expressing the regret of Captain W. Robert Foran that he could not be with us. But by the time this reaches you Captain Foran will probably have organized a chapter of the Adventurers' Club in Chicago. San Francisco is expected to be next in line. Eventually we hope to see chapters of the club dotted all over this country and scattered here and there over the whole wide world.

THE newspaper accounts of the dinner have already brought me applications for membership in the Adventurers' Club. I may as well make the situation clear at once. The club is in no sense an offshoot of this or any other magazine, except in so far as the original idea grew up among a few of us members of the Camp-Fire. I have no claim upon it, and no authority in its affairs beyond a simple membership. Nor has any one else connected with this office.

If any of you wishes to join an already established chapter or to start a chapter in your own town, or a chapter, with annual or semi-annual meetings, for a district with scattered members, I shall be more than glad to see to it personally that your application goes to the parent chapter in New York for consideration, or to be passed on to your local chapter. That is all I have any authority or right to do, and all, I think, that you would ask of me.

Some time very soon there will be a second meeting of the club in New York. Exact qualifications for membership, method of procedure, the admittance of new chapters and various similar matters will then be definitely decided. In so far as the club is willing, I will give you that definite information at the earliest possible moment. New chapters applying for charters can meanwhile probably be referred to the club's temporary committee.

In any and every case, each applicant should state his qualifications as a real adventurer, and give references.

If I had time, I should be glad to acknowledge personally each application that comes in to me, but unfortunately time is a painfully scarce article with me, and I'll have to ask you to take for granted my willingness to be of service and my care in seeing that your letters reach the club or its committee.

THOUGH matters are not yet definitely settled, I feel pretty sure that the Adventurers' Club will shape up against all formalities beyond the very simple ones necessary to organization and perpetuation. That if any dues at all are decided on, they will be only those of the local chapter, to cover the small expenses of sending out notices of meetings and that even these dues are quite likely to be voluntary only. Every man pays for his own dinner, refrains from wearing a dress-suit, and assumes only the obligations of ordinary good-fellowship.

If the first meeting of the first chapter is any indication, the Adventurers' Club has a most interesting future ahead of it.

Back o' Beyond

An Australian's Picture of the Vast Unknown Interior of the Land of the Kangaroo

By L. Warburton

NEXT month there will be a story of Australia by L. Warburton, and from time to time other stories of the Island Continent. Most of us Americans and Canadians know surprisingly little about the real Australia, and it occurred to me that it might be well if we were informed before we have any more stories of that

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largely unknown country. (Much of it, as you will see or already know, is pretty well unknown to everybody.) Mr. Warburton kindly stepped into the breach and gives the Camp-Fire the following on the vast interior of his native land:

"BACK O' BEYOND" in Australia means the limitless expanses of the great interior of the island continent, little known, unoccupied, almost untrodden; beyond the pale of civilization; mythical, mystical; ever calling to the explorer and the adventurer, to whom it offers practically a virgin field for the exercise of enterprise and daring.

Australia is larger than the United States. Its population is roughly only four and a half millions of people, who occupy the coastal areas—a mere handful of humans on the fringe of a continent. The natural deficiency of navigable rivers to penetrate has not as yet been overcome by man's provision of transcontinental railways. There are no mountains barring the country across and lengthwise into fertile territories. Excepting the Australian Alps, which roughly follow the contour of the eastern coast-line, Australia, that "island down in the Pacific somewhere," as one American described it to me, may be said to be flat and mountainless.

Take up your map of the country. If it be fairly modern and minute as to detail, you will find a plethora of nomenclature around the coast-line, indicating the areas of settlement. Across the broad center of the continent the one word "AUSTRALIA" blots out no information of geographical value. This is the "Never-Never," "back o' beyond"—beyond the fertile farms; beyond the farthermost outposts of settlement; beyond the realms of the "squatter," or the sheep-raiser, whose "runs" or "stations" are measured by the hundreds of square miles; where "acres" and "fences," are words unknown in the language of the man "outback."

WHAT is this "Never-Never" country? What is the significance of this name that suggests the indefinable, unknowable, impenetrable land; a bourne from which there is no return? What manner of men have so named it? The answers to these questions are to be found in history, or from the lips of a few score of sun-shriveled, sun-tanned, gray-eyed, soft-spoken men, in whom the wanderlust is acute and insatiable; men who are lost in the broadest, quietest streets of a city, and yet find their way unaided by compass, or the vaguest acquaintance with astronomy, across regions where one may travel for months without the sight of a white man and, perhaps happily, without a glimpse of the nomadic blacks.

The "Never-Never" country is the "No-man's Land" of the early settlers, who rode as far as their flocks or herds could stray, and gazed from a granite-studded hilltop with wondering eyes over interminable wastes of sand-dune or spinifex which gave no answer to the silent question: "What is beyond?" The questioners sadly shook their heads over the riddle of the unknown and called it the "Never-Never." Some of the more adventurous of them, sadly, badly equipped for the task, plunged into the mysterious hinterland to wrest the secret from its unyielding bosom.

A few of them staggered back, beaten. Most of them never returned. To this day there are stories told of wild white men, wandering, always wandering, aimlessly, hopelessly, in the great interior which half a century before took them in as strong young braves and stamped them unalterably with its own grim, silent, mysterious character. The stories belong to the myths and legends with which the "Never-Never" is always associated. The natives—the most superstitious people in the world—speak in awe of the "strange" mad white man, and the bunyip, or devil, which lies at the bottoms of the stagnant pools in the remote interior and comes out to feast on men.

IT HAS been truly said that where the Anglo-Saxon lives superstition has no place; and mystery, if it exists at all, does so only to give him the pleasure of revealing it. There came a day in the history of Anglo-Saxon settlement of Australia when men had conquered the wilds in which they had established their homes and had time to attend to the "Never-Never" and tear the veil of superstition and mystery from its face. If for no other purpose of practical value than to prove their contempt for danger and their intolerance of the fear that skulked and stalked about the outskirts of civilization, they determined to know the hitherto "Unknown."

For years it defied even the bravest of them. Distances were immense. Inhospitable, waterless belts of desert country interposed between them and the heart of the country. Men like Leichardt rode gaily out from the townships, well-horsed and apparently well-equipped for the task of entering the "Never-Never" and emerging safely, after traversing two thousand miles of country. Leichardt and his party never came back. No trace of them has ever been found. Burke and Wills went out, and staggered back to die miserably ten miles from settlement, at the site of their own depot which they found deserted and foodless, owing to some misunderstanding on the part of the relief expedition which should have awaited them there.

BUT some parties succeeded in crossing. They brought back wondrous tales of desert sands, succeeded by plateaux of great altitude, grassed to the horses' girths; of oases where the deep waters in the rock-holes could quench the thirst of a million head of cattle; of strange aboriginal tribes who ran from the sight of the white man and his horse. They proved the "Never-Never" was not unconquerable, but that, attacked in the right way, it yielded its secret. The interior was not a hopeless, barren desert, but presented some of the fairest country ever seen. And yet to-day the general idea of the vast central regions of Australia is that it is all one interminable waste of God-forsaken, useless land.

From east and west, north and south, intrepid explorers set out to attack the true desert that enshrouded the fair heart of the continent from the gaze of men. To-day the "Never-Never" is crisscrossed with the trails of the numerous expeditions. These trails, it is true, are punctuated at frequent intervals with rough headstones marking the human sacrifices to the maw of the wilderness and are branded with such significant nomenclature as "Lake Disappointment," "Desperation Soak," and

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"Mount Hopeless." Each tells its own tale of the awful struggle to get "Back o' Beyond."

IN ONE case, perhaps, after days of following the alluring mirage, which pictured green trees and sweet-grassed plots beside shimmering, cool waters, rising from the sun-scorched spinifex plain, the explorers staggered madly on, flung themselves down in the lake of real water, drank deeply and—suffered the tortures of hell. For Lake Disappointment was salt! Another party reached Desperation Soak when all hope of securing water was gone, but the friendly offices of a captured black had steeled the little party to make a final dash across the burning sand-dunes to where they found a little pool, filled slowly by a scarcely perceptible trickle from some cache of water locked in the bosom of an ironstone outcrop.

At Separation Well, in the far west of the continent, Wells and Jones laid themselves down to die. They had parted from the rest of their expedition at this spot in order that they might make a secondary exploration. Their water supplies running out, they dashed back to Separation Well under a blazing sun, only to find that the meager supply they had last seen there had disappeared. Three months later a rescue party found their skeletons, stripped by the dingos, bleached by the sun. Scratched on the billy-can of Jones, a mere lad, fresh from the Adelaide University when he set out to do a man's work for his country, they found this epitaph:

"How can man die better
Than facing fearful odds
For the ashes of his fathers,
For the temples of his gods?"

The net result of all this exploration and sacrifice of lives consists of ponderous masses of carefully compiled information regarding the inland regions of Australia, and the dissipation of myth, mystery and misconception regarding the land which no man knew when all men called it the "Never-Never."

DESPITE what knowledge has been gained of the interior, that vast region holds but a few dozen white denizens. They consist of men who keep lonely watch over the working of the transcontinental telegraph lines, and an occasional squatter who has been attracted by the immensity of the holdings available to him in this country where few are anxious to go so far from railhead and civilization.

There, in the heart of the continent, the squatter is truly monarch of all he surveys, or can survey in several days of riding. There, in splendid isolation on a tract of what closely resembles the prairie land of America, he can ride a hundred miles one way and a hundred the other, never leaving his cattle station or his sheep-run. He gets a mail twice a year. His wool teams travel for weeks before they reach railhead. He sees a new face occasionally when some "overlander" comes to the homestead to demand the pound of meat and the pint of flour which the unwritten tradition of the bush has stipulated is the minimum of hospitality to be granted without grudging or questioning to each and every wayfarer.

The squatter in good seasons can rely on seeing new faces regularly once a year. If King Drought has taken sides with the desert, and the tracks are waterless, the wool on the sheeps' backs must grow another year. Otherwise, however, the squatter will one day, in the shearing season, see a score of dust-brown men ride up out of the infinite to help him garner his harvest. For a few weeks there will be movement on the station, and the shearing-shed will resound at night with rollicking choruses that have come down through the ages and generations of shearers with the same persistence as those old sea-chanteys that have been sung ever since Noah went to sea in the Ark and lost his certificate on Mount Ararat. Then the shearers depart to cash the checks, the liquidation of which will barely flutter the squatter's bank-account.

THE explorer, the squatter, and the out-back shearer are products of the "Never-Never." Its character is ineffaceably stamped on them. But what manner of other man, or men, has this vast, ludicrously undertenanted expanse produced? Well, there is the "Overlander." He is the man among bushmen who commands their respect because he has "overlanded it;" that is, he has traversed the continent from side to side, or from top to bottom, taking the good with the bad, sand-plain and pasture, poison country, and belts of Mitchella and spear-grass where the herd or the flock wanted to lie down and feast forever.

The overlander is a man who, in a sense, stakes his bushcraft and his capacity to handle live stock and hostile blacks against the squatter's gold. A cattle-raiser of the northwest of Australia will foresee a big jump in the price of beef in the markets of the eastern seaboard, three thousand miles away and twelve months ahead. He could ship his cattle, but that would be expensive and he would not land them in condition. In the circle of his professional acquaintance there is a drover noted for his skilful handling of stock on the long dry marches to market. This man, whose life has been spent in the bush and who has possibly overlanded cattle before, will undertake to get the squatter's surplus stock across the interior for so much per head delivered in market condition, and for a percentage of the natural increase that he can get through, over and above the total of the herd he sets out with. Sometimes, when he is not such a keen business man, he will take the job for wages or a fixed sum.

He sets out with his dogs, maybe a white assistant in addition to his black "boy," and trails away to where the desert lies. Slow though his travel is, he soon passes beyond the farthest settlement, and is lost to sight or knowledge of man for months and months. If he can, he will skirt the desert lands and with his own knowledge of where to find water and feed, backed up by the instinct of his black helpers, he will drive his herd as straight as circumstances permit toward his distant goal.

SUCH tasks may sound easy, but the successful overlander is the man to whom the bushmen lift their hats—metaphorically, of course, for the bushman isn't much on ceremony—and those whom the bushmen delight to honor in song or story, let no man belittle. The overlander takes immense risks despite his wizard-like bushcraft that generally brings him safe across the trackless plains, through the dangers before which others, scarcely less daring, quail.

There is the ever-haunting danger of getting on

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to a waterless route, which but a couple of seasons before was well supplied. That is perhaps the greatest danger of all. The overlander may be induced to follow a course taken before in a good season, and having left a big pool days behind, find the water-hole he expected to be full baked dry as the result of a prolonged drought. The herd is mad with thirst, his horse is knocked up, the water-bag containing a few precious drops of liquid for the sustenance of himself and his mates has to be carefully watched.

LUCKY he is if he can dash madly north or south, driving the cattle through the nights to some stagnant soak that his native companion can direct him to. In such a predicament he generally loses more than half the herd, and congratulates himself if he can save his own life. There are the native tribes who will follow him for miles, spearing the straggling cattle, stampeding the rest of the herd, and stealing on the camp in the first faint haze of dawn. Is it any wonder, with all the difficulties he has to encounter, that he is twelve months, sometimes as long as two years, passing through?

As a man the overlander is perfection. Strong, active and alert he must be. As a mate there is none better in the world. Desertion of a pal, even of the dumb species, is something he would not understand. I have seen these men pass through out-back settlements, walking their horses and tenderly carrying their lame dogs. Maybe there would be a gunnysack, carefully strapped to the saddle, containing a lately born litter of blind puppies, whose fate, it would seem to me, might easily have been decided at the last water-hole. The overlander would walk silently away and never want to see you again if you suggested that to him. If he would talk about it he would tell you he was out to get through with everything, and he left nothing to die on the track. But the overlander doesn't talk. His silence is part of him, learned from the silent wastes in which his life is spent. The babbling, bustling city has no attractions for him. People talk too much, and when he has turned over the herd to his employer's agent, and passed wondering-eyed down the main street, the city knows him no more. He is back in the "Never-Never."

THERE is another class of overlander, or wanderer in the way-back—very few in number it is true—whose calling does not take them there. He could not tell you just why he passes his life far from the haunts of men, and the only explanation of it is that the lure of the wild has got into his blood. He must have freedom, the full measure of freedom which he can feel only when a thousand miles lie between him and anywhere. These men comprise all classes, from gentle-souled, penniless hoboes to strong, virile men of some means who find the acme of happiness in meandering over the continent, free from carking care, strangers alike to city luxuries and city worries.

If ever men answered the call of the wild simply because they had to, it is these nomads. There is something attractive to all men of an adventurous turn of mind in the idea of seeing what is beyond the farthest range of vision. Few men who stand on the very edge of settlement, gazing out on a sea of country that asks the eternal question "What is here?" fail to feel the desire to wander on and find an answer. To such men as I have described the desire is simply irresistible, and once they have yielded to it the wanderlust takes possession of their souls.

I could mention half a dozen men who are continually traversing the "Never-Never" country for no other good reason than that it is attractive to them. There is Birtles, a cyclist who has crossed the continent several times—has, in fact, passed the last five years doing it. God knows what for. If it were for notoriety he got all he wanted on the first trip, when he staggered into civilization more dead than alive. Wise men make a significant movement of the hand to the head when they speak of his idea of a happy life. Maybe they're right, but there's no saner man of my acquaintance than this six feet of barbed wire and whip-cord, who has told me he found delightful natural roads over the high plateau of the Nullabor Plains, and no finer nerve-thriller than outpacing the fleetest native savage, provided he got half a minute's warning and the country was fairly even. One day he'll be short that half-minute and the problem of why he spends his life in the way he does will cease from puzzling.

GAGED by the standards of other lands, "Back o' Beyond" in Australia might, to the casual observer, appear very barren of adventure. There are no wild animals of which man need be afraid, if you except the blacks, than whom, by the way, there is nothing wilder on the face of this earth, when you get into the country where the wild black still exists, and that is in the region I am writing about. Maybe in Australia there are no "bad-men," no gun-fighters, no insurrectos, no native kingships to be fought for and won, but believe me there's plenty of room there for adventure, and the red-blooded man can find it when he steps away from the camel-pad that marks the remote frontier of settlement.

If he seeks other rewards than that which is found in the satisfaction of having successfully defied the dangers of the desert lands, he can get them. A deal can always be made with the State Governments for the loan of camels and equipment in order to locate permanently watered and grassed stock-routes leading from one pastoral region to another, and a big reward awaits the man who finds a trail that stockmen can follow with absolute security. When that is done the day of the overlander as King of the "Never-Never" will have gone by.

The lure of gold is always there, beckoning men into the wilderness. When the seasons are propitious and there is promise of a safe trip into the interior, gnarled and toughened old prospectors battle their way out as far as they can get, and ever their story is the same. The gold-streaked quartz-veins, unprofitable in themselves, point the way farther inland to an El Dorado. That, every man will tell you without a suspicion of doubt in his own mind, lies out there close to the heart of the continent. Ever dreaming of finding it, the prospector starts out, but, so far, the Ophir of Terra Australis has evaded him. When he does locate it, as he will, gold-hungry hordes of men will stamp down a road to it. Railways will follow from all directions. Towns will spring up within sound of the clattering stamps. The "Never-Never" will cease to be anything more than a memory of the day when there were a few score of Men "Back o' Beyond."

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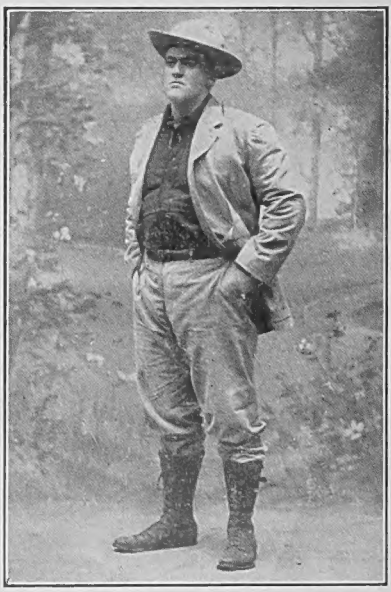

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